Vol 58

THE SMART SET

A Magazine of Cleverness

To Amuse, Not to Instruct

THE SON OF A HUNDRED GRANDFATHERS

FOOTSTEPS

THE BOLDINI MADONNA

FUGITIVES

THE SUBTLE THREAD

MOONLIGHT

THE BED-POST

THE ZANY

AND MANY OTHER STORIES, POEMS, EPIGRAMS, ETC.

AUGUST 1919

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THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF CLEVERNESS

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Editor—J. W. MILNE

AUGUST, 1919

THE BOLDINI MADONNA	Richmond Brooks Barrett	307
THE SUBTLE THREAD	Mary Carolyn Davies	337
THE REASON	Mrs. L. G. R. Hitchins	340
THE SHRINE	Louis Untermeyer	340
THE ILLUSION	L. M. Hussey	341
IN THE KEY OF BLUE	T. F. Mitchell	351
GIFTS	Babette Deutsch	351
A CHANT FOR LOVERS	Harry Kemp	352
THE NOBLE MOMENT	N. G. Caylor	353
CHATTER	E. Gifford Noyes	356
THE SON OF A HUNDRED GRANDFATHERS	Olga Petrova	357
FUGITIVES	Mary Carolyn Davies	363
MY LOVES: THEIR RISE AND FALL	John Hamilton	368
FOOTSTEPS	George B. Jenkins, Jr.	369
THE BEAUTIFUL THING	Murray Leinster and George B. Jenkins, Jr.	375
PRACTICE MAKES	Elinor Maxwell	382
REVISITED	John V. A. Weaver	382
THE ZANY	Lillian Foster Barrett	383
REVERSION	David Morton	390
THE FIRST PROPHET	Harry Kemp	391
BURIED TREASURE	Proctor Fitzgerald	392
SONG	Michael Crevequer	392
THE BED-POST	Gertrude Brooke Hamilton	393
CAPRICE	Babette Deutsch	401
MOONLIGHT	Theodosia Garrison	402
MY LADY	John McClure	402
ABOUT FASHIONS AND OTHER THINGS	Various Hands	404
MOTORS AND MOTORING	W. Whittall	408

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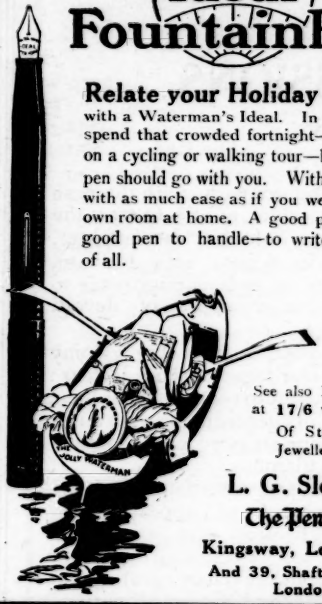

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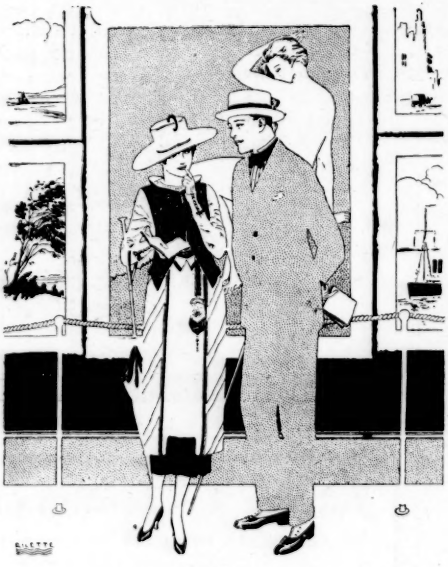

"A Summer Exhibition"

I have no sympathy with the pose of Chelsea, which affects to treat the Academy as a matter for laughter, nor am I in accord with Balham, which takes its annual pilgrimage to Piccadilly in a spirit of devout reverence.

For myself, I enter the gloomy portals of Burlington House in fear; am I not about to see my fellow-men, the men of my generation, as posterity will see them, stripped of all contemporaneous glamour?

Hundreds of years hence, perhaps, a certain portrait will appear in some historic collection with some other title, such as, "Typical Briton of the Armageddon Age (circa 1920). Note Frock Coat and Cigar of period," therefore I gaze upon the presentment with respect and awe, and wonder what on earth Anno Domini 2019 will have to say of our age and its trappings.

But in trying to form a judgment of our age, the enquiring citizen of 2019 will be severely handicapped. From the portraits before him he will come to the conclusion that the Britain of to-day was chiefly populated by ugly old men wearing ugly and shapeless clothes.

The Art magazines of the future will probably produce them under new titles: "David in one of Goliath's misfits." "Impressions of a typical elderly chairman of a tribunal for military exemption. Note war-like attire and malignant expression." "Study of a dark suit of the dark age."

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* * * * *

It is a needlessly ugly age, and before Dora departs for ever she might do worse than forbid the perpetuation of the ugliness of ugly old men in their ugly old clothes. We have no right to offend the artistic senses of posterity.

* * * * *

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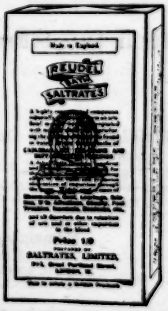

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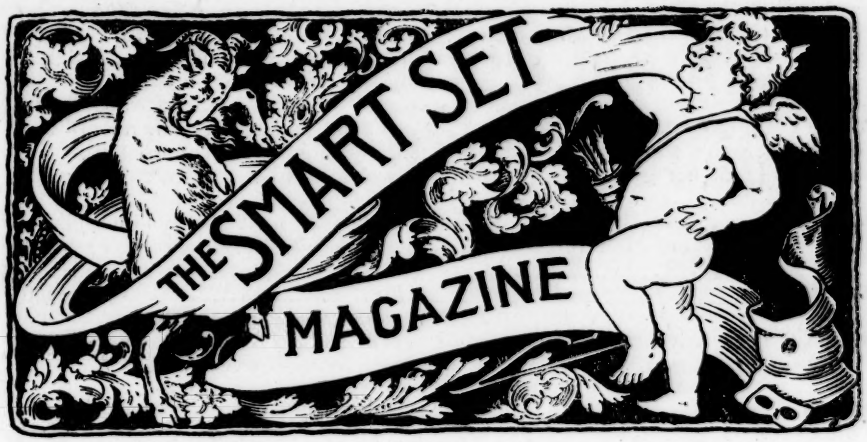

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THE BOLDINI MADONNA

By Richmond Brooks Barrett

CHAPTER I

MRS. SLOANE stood on the balcony outside her dressing-room. The summer night touched her with its warm serenity. The breeze beat upon her with the gentle regularity of wings. A fragrance, exhaled from the earth, floated up into the still shadows. The woman on the balcony moved slowly away from the strip of radiance thrown through the open French window. She leaned over the balustrade.

It was the sort of night Mrs. Sloane could respond to with ardour; on this occasion, however, she had eyes only for a glittering illumination in the distance. Mrs. Benjamin Weston was giving a spectacular ball; the electric glare emanated from her estate.

Mrs. Sloane, her back to the moon, sighed as she gazed; she even trembled slightly. The quiver that shook her was not unlike the nervous start of a horse at first sight of the hurdle.

At last Mrs. Sloane turned and walked quickly back to her dressing-room. In the dark, the gleam of her arms and the lustre of the white gown she wore had imparted almost a luminousness to her appearance.

Facing her image in a tall mirror, she gave an impression only of excessive modernity. Her bodice frothed and sparkled, as if in an ineffectual attempt to prevent the wearer from looking quite nude. At the hips, the costume became amazingly severe of cut, sweeping in long, clinging lines to the floor, where it spread out into a preposterous train and foamed anew.

In short, it was the kind of gown Boldini had brought into vogue. All pretty women loved the daring fashion and exulted in the mastery of its difficulties; they had not as yet awakened to the vulgarity of it.

Mrs. Sloane's beauty was of a sufficiently arresting and eccentric type to be heightened by the complex garments enveloping it. Slender to a degree, she amazed one by the perfect beauty of her back and by the exquisite budding

swell of her bosom. French modistes found no other woman who could wear clothes with quite the skill of Mrs. Sloane.

The peculiar thing about her was that she never impressed one as clothed at all. Rather she seemed always to be floating out of her gowns as out of a scintillant flood.

A man once found himself famous (but that was years after the night of Mrs. Weston's ball) merely because he had remarked:

"Sybil is a perfect Aphrodite—rising from the sea, you know—and more than half clear of it, too."

Mrs. Sloane smiled at herself in the mirror. Nothing she had ever seen could compare with her eyes, she thought. She was quite just in that appraisal. They were magnificent eyes, long and sleepy and yet with fire somewhere in their black depths. They gave to her skin a startling whiteness; one would have said they usurped all the power she possessed and absorbed all her strength. They were volcanic, triumphant. Her other features were of a delicacy approaching the unearthly by comparison.

Suddenly a door burst open and Timothy Sloane strode across the floor with a force that set all the dainty things in the boudoir shaking.

"What in hell's the matter?" he sputtered. "You've kept me kicking my heels downstairs for an hour."

Mrs. Sloane ignored this.

As her irate husband came to a full stop beside her, she turned her beautiful back upon him and addressed the maid in a gracious tone.

"I think I am ready for my cloak," she said.

Timothy Sloane stormed away in a rumble of curses. His wife still lingered in front of the glass, bringing order out of the lacy chaos of her evening wrap. At last, satisfied of the effect she would produce, she swept out of the room and glided in swirling grace down the staircase.

One calm look of scorn was all Sloane got for the scowl of rage he shot at her as she descended to his level. She walked past him as if he were a footman. He scuffled along behind and climbed into the motor after her.

"I'll be damned if I waste my time like this again," he announced.

He began to cough, catching himself up now and then with a short gasp.

Mrs. Sloane sat quietly in her corner. She vouchsafed no sympathy; in the darkness, she might have been merely a large exotic flower, exhaling a heady fragrance. Her eyes rested on the man beside her; occasionally, as his choking spasm would reach a climax of inarticulate gurgles, she would shiver and shrink away from him in disgust.

The sigh she gave when he at last quieted down was occasioned not by solicitude for her husband's well-being, but by the reflection that his face would still be purple for a long time. Mrs. Weston and her guests could not but be revolted by the spectacle he would present. A feeling of discouragement began to weigh on her; she should never have attempted Newport, she told herself; at least, she should have waited until—

But the motor had stopped.

Mrs. Sloane, with an unruly heart, watched her husband grope his way heavily out of the automobile. He turned and extended his arm; the attitude of polite deference by no means became him. His wife, leaning lightly on him, stepped from the shadow into the warm light. She stood still for a moment and glittered and shimmered.

The picture was compelling, she knew. Then she looked at Timothy Sloane and caught her lip to keep the expression of contempt from her face.

In the passionate desire to captivate her audience, there had mingled a foreboding of failure, a certainty that her husband would somehow thwart her. It was but natural, therefore, that she should gaze upon his disfigurements and with feverish imagination magnify them.

As a matter of fact, he was a big

man who had become much too stout. There were traces about him of good looks; but the resistless tide of fat had obscured and altered what fine points he had once possessed. For many years he had filled his skin to bursting, yet with an effect of rather pleasant sleekness; all at once there had come a general let-down, a perceptible sagging of flesh in places. As a result his appearance had become lumpy. Pouches had developed in his previously smooth rotundity.

He was not, to be sure, attractive; he was not, however, the outrageous creature his wife was beginning to consider him. Had she ever brought herself to the point of examining him dispassionately it might have occurred to her he was ill. Even that thought would not have caused her to relent, for she would have known it was his excessive drinking that was telling on him at last.

He swayed and coughed as she surveyed him.

A slight tremor of alarm passed through her; but she dismissed the fear and spread her gown around her preparatory to the pretty entrance she had planned so long.

CHAPTER II

On the day before Mrs. Weston despatched the invitations to her ball, the Timothy Sloanes had been the subject of an animated discussion. A group gathered for tea on Mrs. Weston's terrace had focussed a fitful attention on the topic.

Mrs. Anthony Willoughby began it.

"Are you going to ask the redoubtable Sloanes to your party, Alice?" She addressed Mrs. Weston.

"I haven't quite decided." Mrs. Weston smiled broadly. "Freddie has been begging so prettily I think I shall give in to him."

"Freddie!" Miss Winton exclaimed. "What under the sun has Freddie to do with it?"

"He worships Mrs. Tim," Mrs. Weston elucidated. "Of course he doesn't know her; but he thinks she's tragic and beautiful."

"She *is* beautiful," said Reggie Fleet. "Every man I've seen agrees with Fred there."

"*I* agree, too," returned Mrs. Weston. "She is so beautiful she's absurd. She is indescribable, with her wonderful indecent eyes."

"I know just the words that do describe her," announced Fleet. "You've given me the cue, Alice. Mrs. Tim is obscenely beautiful."

That evoked a roar of laughter. Mrs. Willoughby in particular filled the air with a ripple of liquid tones that somehow affected one as the result of technique rather than spontaneous mirth; but then, the lady's charm lay in her perfect art. She was as symmetrical a product of wealth as a sunken garden.

Had Mrs. Willoughby not been so lovely, so sweetly musical, people might have called her conventional. If she should ever go insane, it would be to the accompaniment of a flute. "Gracious and womanly"—so she was always termed; that is, until debts began to worry her.

Mrs. Weston, on the other hand, gave vent to merriment by throwing herself back in her chair and shouting. She was a bluff woman, to put it mildly, and seldom practised modulation; she was the sort that no corset can check for long.

"Does anyone know what she's like? Has she a history of any kind?" Miss Winton, who had merely smiled at Fleet's witticism, took up the subject of Mrs. Sloane. Miss Winton was a quiet girl, not without a vein of curiosity in her athletic makeup.

"Oh, yes," supplied Fleet. "I know a good deal about her. She comes of splendid stock—old Southern family; they've all been disreputable for generations—a typical aristocratic crowd—splendid stock."

Miss Winton frowned. "You are

unkind. You have probably made that up this minute, just to be clever."

"No, he's truthful," said Mrs. Weston.

Her attention had begun to wander; but, catching the word "disreputable," she had experienced a revival of interest. "I've heard something very much like that. I've heard she was Spanish—a descendant of the Aztecs and some explorer—Columbus, I think."

"Alice backs me up," laughed Fleet. "You see, the two stories are much the same."

"They come to the same thing," opined Mrs. Willoughby. "Some dreadful heritage, isn't that the idea?"

"Exactly," agreed Fleet. "It may turn out to be only malaria, but it's an interesting problem, at any rate."

"Good heavens!" protested Miss Winton. "If she's as unhealthy as all that, can't somebody deport her?"

"Reggie is trying to scare us off, so that he can have Mrs. Tim all to himself." Mrs. Willoughby smiled prettily at Fleet in a way that gave the lie to her statement.

"Upon my word, I swear I've never spoken to the woman." Fleet returned Mrs. Willoughby's smile.

"Well, after all, isn't that the first thing we've heard in her favour this afternoon?" Mrs. Willoughby wanted to know.

"Let Freddie talk to you about her," said Mrs. Weston. "He's made up quite an original story; he says it *must* be true. The point is, according to Freddie, that she was the daughter of fine but beggared parents. She married Tim Sloane to save the old people from the poor-house. Now she is pining away—getting to be all eyes—just because she's so much better than her husband."

"Very original of Freddie!" mocked Fleet.

"Does Freddie say what the parents think now of their daughter's bare back?" asked Mrs. Willoughby.

"Freddie doesn't *know* anything about it," said Mrs. Weston. "This is all conjecture; but he does believe it."

"I think one can tell to look at her that she hasn't the instincts of a white woman," announced Mrs. Willoughby. "I am sure the Aztec story must be the true version."

"Well, I shall ask her to my party," said Mrs. Weston. "There's nothing startling in that, is there? I always ask everybody in sight, anyhow, to my big affairs."

She signalled with her highball glass to a figure in the distance.

"Now, let's drop Mrs. Tim," she warned. "Here comes Freddie and he won't listen to stories against her."

CHAPTER III

MRS. SLOANE really delighted people at the ball. Despite the exaggerated splendour of her costume, she struck one as after all childish and ingenuous. Such spontaneous gaiety was refreshing; a short conversation with the lady left one soothed, as if a cool, bright billow had suddenly rippled its way across the floor and broken over one with a delicate plash.

She covered ground with speed, flashed into one's vision and then in an instant was out of sight. She was never in a hurry, however; she just drifted about airily like thistle-down. For all the expanse of bare surface she displayed and the very feminine charm she exerted, it was hard to believe, if one judged by her motion, that she had legs.

"You were right at that, Freddie—that is, in one respect," Mrs. Weston confided to her nephew, Frederick Mallory. "Your Mrs. Sloane is delightful—quite the best sort. She might have been common, you know. How were we to suspect she would carry her gowns off so superbly? But she never could be the child of paupered parents. I still can't think her *human*."

Mallory smiled and a beam of delight showed in his gentle eyes.

"She does seem too dazzling for human nature's daily food," he commented. "She's a—a sort of fountain congealed or—well, I can't say what she suggests. She is elusive; you can't put your finger on her."

His aunt's characteristic, broad smile brought him up short.

"There you go," he protested, "just because her gown is low you think my last remark was funny. Really, Aunt Alice, it's wonderful what enjoyment you can still get out of the obvious."

He gave her a good-natured scowl.

"I'm sorry, Freddie," she apologized. "But when you get poetical you do blunder."

It was quite evident that young Mallory had fallen in love with the radiant Mrs. Tim. His aunt was by no means alarmed. She did not pretend to understand Freddie; but she knew he was to be trusted. He was not the kind to become involved in a scandal.

Everybody felt sorry for Mallory; he was upright, admirable, pitiful. He was really unique—an ascetic with a wild desire to worship something high and immensely exalted. Born into a civilization that had no place for such as he, he had been forced to absorb a certain amount of alloy. He never could have survived in his original pure state.

The result was that he had developed a sort of scholarly reticence as a protection against the people about him. His fund of devotion had been drawn on, not for the promotion of a religious body, but in the cause of beauty. He was a votary of poetry, music and painting.

And now, of a sudden, he had found himself prostrate before the vision of Mrs. Timothy Sloane. It was ludicrous; even Mallory was instinctively aware of that. Mrs. Tim was neither high nor immensely exalted; whatever was remarkable in her elevation was due only to her French heels.

He was just a bit frightened. He had never before thrown himself at a woman's feet. It was a piece of ironic injustice to thrust him into the world at such an epoch. He would have been much happier as a contemporary of the Egyptian hermits; he would then have had the right to scramble up on a pillar and nod his life away in awe-struck reverence. It was not yet too late, however, to draw the fellow out and humanize him; but nobody would have picked Mrs. Sloane for the job.

On the occasion of his aunt's ball, Mallory ventured into hitherto undiscovered lands of faery. Mrs. Sloane was at the helm, one might say; for, although Mallory had guided her away from the house to the parapet overlooking the ocean, it had seemed, strangely enough, as if she had floated on in front, flutteringly near and yet unattainable and as if she had pointed the way to the little Greek temple where they paused.

They were on the brink. They leaned upon the balustrade and peered at the water washing the wall of masonry far below. The moonlight lent to Mrs. Sloane's skin the gleam of alabaster and set her gown to flashing whitely.

She drank in the night and was silent for a moment; it was one of the most fascinating of her traits that she could appear placid and yet at the same time was never still. She was always alertly vivacious; but her continual effervescence gave her an added zest for the beholder. She was in this like champagne just poured. Her voice added the silver tinkle necessary to complete the bewitching effect she created.

She glanced over her shoulder at the small marble edifice behind them.

"Isn't it charming?" She did not wait for his answer. "It is a mistake, though, expecting us to live up to a background like that."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Sloane. It's a perfect picture, just like this."

Mallory's tone had a tentative quality, as if, not sure of his ground, he were venturing abroad only carefully and on tip-toe.

"No!" She pursed her lips. "Our

clothes are absurd to-day. They are meant for a drawing-room, where one doesn't cast a shadow. Greek robes must have fitted into the picture, like those columns."

She pointed to the parallel blocks of shade the pillars threw across the terrace.

"Now look at my silhouette," she continued, indicating the grotesque outline stretching over the ground at her feet.

"See how fat and puffy it is—like a goose or something."

Mrs. Sloane struck the note of childish eagerness.

"But why give one's attention to a shadow?" he asked. "*You* look like a swan in that gown. I don't care to see what's beneath your feet."

He was both surprised and pleased to hear himself so glib.

"I suppose a shadow does serve its purpose—even the shadow of a modern frock." She looked down again. "It's like an allegory, isn't it?"

She smiled as the thought struck her. "I might be an angel treading down a demon."

Mallory did not reply; his silence was one of rapt adoration. Mrs. Sloane cleverly took the measure of his attitude. She glided up the steps leading to the temple and paused at the top to toss him a smile. Their gaze held for a perceptible space.

Just at the moment when she was preparing to droop her head as if vanquished by his steady contemplation, Mallory looked away. An expression of impatience, almost of sullen disapproval, crossed his face. The poor fellow was giving way to savage annoyance at himself for the embarrassment that had overwhelmed him and caused him to shy; it appeared, however, like involuntary condemnation of his companion.

The sound of laughter reached them. People were approaching. Mrs. Sloane descended the steps. She rustled across the terrace to him and together they returned to the house. Mallory still had nothing to say. He had let her arch glance confuse him hopelessly. She, on her side, had stiffened and was holding her head primly erect. Mallory knew what she was thinking—that he had judged her delicate coquetry brazen and had, as it were, taken to his heels.

He got hot in the bewildered effort to formulate a deft phrase that would show her he was not after all so abysmal an ass. He wrestled with himself to no purpose. The silence was still unbroken when they reached the ballroom.

"It's such a perfect night—somehow talking would take away—something." He would not have volunteered it if he had not been desperate.

Mrs. Sloane merely raised her eyebrows. Dismissing him with sweet dignity, she turned to receive the homage of Reginald Fleet.

Mallory was aghast at his clumsiness. How *could* a man behave so like a dunce? For all his reticence he had at least acquired ease in the years he had been about. What had betrayed him, he wondered. Did infatuation always knock people on the head this way?

Fleet at once dropped into a tone of easy intimacy with Mrs. Sloane.

"Have you been out getting your feet wet?" he asked.

"No," she returned with a challenging smile. "I have kept to the beaten track."

She grimaced at the retreating figure of Mallory.

"Besides," she continued, "it is not my habit to go wading in fountains."

It was daring. She alluded to a disgraceful performance of the previous summer, in which her companion was implicated. The story had still a tang then; it took several years to render it quite stale.

Fleet laughed and hung his head with deliberate intent; he levelled a sly shaft from his handsome eyes.

"Why do you scoff?" he asked. "Do you know that wading can be made beautiful? Let me inform you it is an art, even a rite if it's done properly."

"Perhaps," she agreed—"by moonlight." She had already decided Fleet was charming.

"Oh, I don't defend such a proceeding at noon," he assured her.

"So the tale is true." She shook her head. "You don't look the type to play schoolboy pranks."

"Nothing delights women so much as two-year-old capers from us," he replied with mock sententiousness.

"I wonder." She ruminated. "It *is* possible. People love the depravity of an act that used to be done by them in all innocence."

"You put it very strongly," he said. "I object to 'depravity.'"

"Should you like me to call your conduct cheap?" she asked.

"Good Lord, no," he expostulated. "What we do on impulse may be absurd—it may be depraved—but it's seldom cheap. Bringing the thing to light later and discussing it—that is cheap, it seems to me."

"How cruel of you!" She winced daintily as he chuckled above her. "You don't present your case convincingly, though. One can't picture you in a moment of impulse. Everything is premeditated with you, I fear."

"Certainly not. If I had been that sort, I should be a married man with a family now. I know that would be best for me but I can't pull it off. I often wish somebody would take me by the collar and push me up the aisle to the altar."

"You are getting mixed," she said. "It's the bride that one pushes up the aisle."

It was a deliberate hint on her part; she meant him to take it up and ponder over it. He would decide that marriage had been forced on her. She wanted him to get the false impression and spread the report.

She paused and looked away.

"I see my husband prowling about on the lookout for me." She gave Fleet a dazzling smile and made her way across the room to Sloane.

"I am going," announced Sloane testily. "I never was so bored in my life."

His voice was under imperfect control; the words reached a good many ears.

His grievance was a substantial one. Deserted on the very threshold by his wife, he had been forced to fare for himself. He had approached several people and attempted to appear at ease with them by adopting an air of gruff defiance. He had not been treated with cordiality and had been dealt out the rebuffs he courted. He therefore gave up in a fury the pursuit of sociable companions and found some solace in abundant draughts of champagne. It was impossible to make a man like Sloane drunk; he could be counted on in that at least not to disgrace himself.

"Don't be stupid, Tim," admonished his wife. "It is far too early to go home."

"You do as you like. I am going," he pursued. "I am going *now*, do you hear?"

"Very well."

Frigidly she yielded the point, knowing that, once the tone of stubbornness crept into his voice, he would kick up an unseemly row if she attempted to cross him.

There was the bitterest sort of resentment in her heart. She had progressed so well; if she could but have lingered, the night would have wound up in triumph for her. Of that she was certain. Now ludicrous rumours would begin to circulate. People would soon be treating each other to an account of Mrs. Sloane's abrupt departure, undoubtedly to tuck her sodden spouse into bed.

Sloane, with a confused haste that puzzled her, began to stride away.

"Please wait for me," she called after him. When she had caught up, she murmured, "you are doing this merely to humiliate me."

"Oh, go to hell!" he responded under his breath.

Mrs. Sloane carried off the departure with delicate ease. While she and Tim were descending the long flight of marble steps to their motor, she turned

and tossed one last wistful glance behind. The strum of the orchestra reached her; she sighed.

Suddenly there came a tug at her cloak, followed by a sound half a gasp and half a sob.

In terror, she shrank back and trembled under a weight that had begun to press upon her.

Not until she raised her eyes to her husband did she get the force of it all. He was toppling, his head thrown against her shoulder. She caught sight of the blood suffusing his eyes. As she stood still and helpless, he swung away from her and crashed down the steps.

Mrs. Weston's footman jumped from his position at the door of the motor.

The Sloane servants, scrambling out of the automobile, had joined him and were bending over the prostrate man before Mrs. Sloane had conquered the faintness sweeping over her and descended to them.

"Let me call Mrs. Weston, Madame," urged the footman. "We could carry Mr. Sloane to one of the bed-chambers."

Mrs. Sloane, however, preserved the social instinct even in the midst of tragedy.

"I don't wish Mrs. Weston disturbed," she replied firmly. "We must get him into the motor; it will be far better for him to be at home."

The bewildered servants bundled the terrible figure somehow into the automobile. His wife, sitting up very straight in the corner, held the head on her lap. With admirable calm, she gave orders. At last, after final instructions to Mrs. Weston's man in regard to summoning a physician and an incisive command to say nothing to his mistress until the next morning, the woman found herself shut in with her husband.

The light of a passing street-lamp flashed into the motor. Mrs. Sloane looked down at the man's face. She felt herself shuddering all over.

In a moment she had burst into hysterical sobs.

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Weston, at the Casino the following afternoon, enthusiastically acclaimed Mrs. Sloane; everyone who heard the story hailed the début of the tragic heroine.

"Why the ride didn't kill him I don't know." Mrs. Weston voiced her amazement. "And I can't make out how he fitted into the motor; it seems he was on the floor, with his head propped up. It was Spartan; but it was kind. It saved my dance."

Fleet laughed. "I call it comic. It's the funniest thing that has happened this season."

"She is a woman in a thousand, of course." Mrs. Willoughby spoke, however, without enthusiasm; she alone meted out a measured praise. "Still, I can't help thinking the act brutal; she strikes me as homicidal. You all say she was superb. I quite agree; but the coup was *too* clever. It wasn't womanly."

"And it wasn't your party, Nora," Fleet reminded her.

Mrs. Sloane, if she had heard these comments, would have wearily acknowledged the justice of Nora Willoughby's contention. She had striven, all that anxious night, to put away the sense of guilt; but self-accusation had beaten like a pulse through her consciousness, even while she stood at the doctor's side and rendered him deft aid. She had refused to leave the room where her husband lay; her quiet competence had been remarkable.

She had broken down at last, late in the morning. In bed she found it impossible to sleep; she tossed about, trembling and sobbing brokenly, until they quieted her with a drug.

As a matter of fact, the strain had distorted her vision and thrown everything out of focus; from the moment her husband fell, she had been delirious and had fancied herself sane. There had been nothing to steady her; yet, in the midst of confusion, she had appeared cool.

She forgot to take into consideration her terror and bewilderment; it seemed to her she had acted abominably in cold blood. Her husband was dying, that she was sure of; and at the instant of crisis she had sacrificed him in the interest of a hostess, had risked his life merely because it might have annoyed Mrs. Weston to witness the gruesome intrusion upon the festive scene. It was an overwrought imagination, certainly, that the sleeping-powder was called upon to soothe.

Days of abject repentance followed. Poor Tim became for his wife an object of wellnigh maternal solicitude. She hung over him constantly in a cloud of exquisite drapery. The calls of the sick-room had found her with a wardrobe ill-adapted to such an exigency.

For a time she thought of ordering a quantity of severe costumes, cut with a beautiful suitability to the occasion. In the end, however, she decided that a morning-wrapper would perhaps cheer the sufferer in his lucid moments, for of course the sick love what is fragrant and flower-like.

She therefore swept up and down before the bed in her most delicate negligées. They by no means impeded her progress. Her ministrations continued faithful and effective.

Little by little, she lost the belief that she had committed a crime. The habit of giving comfort and executing instructions made her almost happy; and in her heart a quite authentic feeling of pity and tenderness lay. She no longer, now that her husband had been struck down, shrank away from him. As she would press her frail fingers to his forehead, no tremor would shake her.

Sybil Sloane had never before witnessed the struggle against death. Both her parents had died in the South while she was abroad. The doors of sick-rooms had always been closed to her; and she had been given a sight of dead faces only after the marks of suffering had been removed. Like many persons who have been fostered to perfection at a distance from all signs of decay, she responded to this new note of human weakness and pathos. There was even a trace of legitimate curiosity in her attitude.

At the end of a fortnight, the attending physicians dropped guarded hints of a possible recovery. The sick man's mind cleared. One morning he mumbled something as his wife rustled past him; he had recognized her. His speech improved rapidly, though it came from him with an effect of being forced out through clogged passages.

"Your husband, we are convinced, will get well." At last the announcement came.

Mrs. Sloane stood quite still. The words, she felt, were preposterous; such a possibility had never presented itself to her mind. She had up to this time brushed aside the tentative suggestions of hopefulness as absurd. The news gave her a distinct shock.

In her boudoir, she settled herself among the cushions of the divan and lit a cigarette. The attitude of easy repose brought out all the sinuous slenderness of her figure; at that moment she might have been posing for Sargent. The effect seemed studied. It was characteristic of Sybil Sloane to look her best when she was alone and confronting the future in perfect earnestness.

So Tim would recover. She had not, after all, been preparing him for death. He was there to be reckoned with; life would soon settle again into the old routine. The fit of apoplexy would leave the man a more potent factor than ever in his wife's problematical career. Weakness would keep him constantly near; physical disability would but add fuel to his explosive temper.

The new feeling of permanence in the tie from which she had imagined herself almost free hurt like a bodily ache. A protest against the injustice of everything stirred in her. She had forgotten completely now that there had ever been in her mind the thought

of guilt in connection with his illness.

Sybil consulted her watch. It was her custom to visit Tim at just this moment every day. She rose. Reaching the top of the staircase, she hesitated. Then, instead of continuing along the corridor, she descended quickly to the first floor. The door of the music room shut behind her with a smart emphasis.

For over an hour, Sybil played. It took only one Chopin valse to dissipate the gloom that had enveloped her. Emotions with her possessed a theatric volatility. The liquid rippling of a piano could waft her straight out of despondency into the empyrean. Music had an effect more subtly purifying, more tonic with Sybil than fresh air; it might be said that she filled her lungs with deep draughts of delicate sound.

She got a score of "Faust" and opening to the "Roi de Thulé" ballad began to sing softly. The atmosphere of Marguerite's garden stole over her like silvery twilight.

As her hands crashed out a chord that set her vibrating, she realized with a little start that she had run through the entire act. She had responded completely to the magic of it; the last delicate surrender in Faust's arms had left her trembling. She turned back to the "Air des Bijoux" and sang it again, this time with a tiny furrow between her eyes; it was evident she held herself in check with a view to dispassionate criticism.

After she had finished, she relaxed, sighing. Closed eyes and a tired droop of the head showed her discouraged. Her voice had lost something. The trill had no longer the perfect evenness that had once been her boast; the swelling rapture was still there, but that did not satisfy her. How beautifully, with what perfect art, she had done the thing in Paris!

Suddenly she remembered Timothy Sloane. She caught her lip in bitter irony at the recollection. He and his millions had seemed the supreme prize to her, during those student days in Paris. She thought of the exultation, the joy in her heart when she had forced him to his knees. His vulgarity had by no means revolted her aristocratic sensibilities. The marriage had meant an end of hard work. The début in Brussels had loomed, so terrifying, just ahead. Sloane's wooing had been clumsy but well-timed. Sybil, relinquishing the prospect of triumph as a prima donna, had decided a career as a society matron would suffice. The five years of her married life had taught her that a Western husband with millions may be a handicap that bodes defeat even for a descendant of Virginia planters. New York families are apt to be wary of Southern blue blood when it is not mingled with the more equable fluid bequeathed by Knickerbocker ancestors.

Mrs. Sloane, tracing the course of her life with a relentlessly clear sight, stopped short before the vision of the stricken man upstairs. Pity for herself overwhelmed her and, sinking into a chair by the window, she began to weep.

After a time, the throbbing of her pulse began to hurt dully; she had cried herself into a headache. As her gaze drifted aimlessly through the window, it occurred to her that she had not been out of the house for a week. It was a dazzling day, with a heady breeze and a continual winged race of shadows over the water. Sybil decided she needed a bracing ride.

The change from the iridescent billows of a tea gown to a compact habit took time. Tim must be already uneasy, Sybil reflected; the thought seemed not to worry her.

The wind rushed by and sang in her ears when Sybil cantered briskly out of the drive; it was as if an invisible frolicsome scamper were going on in the air. She brightened. Not even a headache could assert its sway over her for long.

At the gate, she paused a moment,

then decided for a run over the beaches. It was something of an effort to turn her back on the more frequented thoroughfares; she knew the picture she made on a horse. Still, it would be best to efface herself until all the world should share with her the tidings of her husband's return to life.

Skirting the cheap precincts of Easton's Beach, Sybil galloped the length of Purgatory Road; as she checked the pace, enabling her horse to pick a dainty way down the slope to Second Beach, she noticed a solitary horseman on the sandy stretch.

He was riding in her direction; before she had gone far, she recognized Mallory.

Her greeting was cordial. He responded with a dignified attempt at gaiety; his quick flush of delight pleased her. She had gone over more than once in her mind the ridiculous scene on the steps of Mrs. Weston's temple. In the end, she had come discriminately to judge his attitude as flattering. It was possible he might prove a dreadful bore on further acquaintance; but, Sybil had determined, he was at least a gentleman and merited a trial.

He questioned her at once about her husband. It was but natural, of course; yet it struck her that Reginald Fleet would have begun far afield.

"I have just heard splendid news," she told Mallory. "My husband is pulling himself together and winning his fight."

"Ah, I am so glad. Do you know, I can see that you too have been battling and helping him win."

The tone she had set was stiff; she lightened it, fearing a bombastic tendency on his part.

"Oh, dear," she wailed, "have I developed wrinkles?"

He could be gallant but not agile. "No, no; you have a triumphant air. You show that you have just come from a field of victory."

As he spoke, Sybil deliberated.

Why not talk seriously with this man? Might it not be refreshing to drop the tone of banter for once?

She surveyed him, found herself approving of his gentle good looks and mentally told herself it was unfair thus to keep him at a disadvantage. It would be something of a novelty, in any case, to draw him out and to exercise for his delectation her well-schooled intellect.

"We talk as if I had wrestled with death and thrown him," she remarked. "A modern dressing-up of the Alcestis story, isn't it?—the woman does the throwing, don't you see?"

He laughed out a surprised appreciation.

"We *have* reduced death to ridiculous proportions in modern literature, haven't we?" he commented. "I suppose Ibsen started it with his rubbish about suicide being obsolete and all that. Nowadays, the death of a hero is considered a dreadful anti-climax."

"It's true." She showed an eager desire to follow it up. "We have reduced death and made it so feeble that a woman *could* throw it. That is going too far."

"It's a fad and will pass," he assured her.

"I hope so," she returned. "I like nothing better than a successfully executed death—in a book or a play. I can't say I fancy the act in real life, though."

"Isn't it extraordinary?" he cried. "I have been afraid to talk to you, because I thought you might be rattle-brained, like all the other lovely ladies I know."

"You were sure, if you looked into my head, that you'd find it resembled a vanity box, weren't you?" She laughed. "Empty except for a very fluffy powder-puff. My brain, I assure you, is more like an untidy suitcase."

She developed the far-fetched image elaborately; she relished his attitude of charmed attention. "I go rummaging about in it and never can find what I want—it's most disconcerting."

"It seems to me you have your brain remarkably well packed. You have had no difficulty to-day, at any rate, in finding what you were after." He radi-

ated enthusiasm; he so seldom got the opportunity to be himself.

"I do know more than I'm usually willing to admit," she confessed. "Father was a scholar and a tyrant—not a typical Southerner at all. He fed my mind forcibly, so it got more nourishment than a silly girl's should."

"I say," he suggested, "should you like to walk a bit?"

She complied and turned their horses over to her groom.

They got on famously.

Before the afternoon was over, they were the best of friends. The tone of the conversation soon dropped to a normal level and they found themselves chatting quite simply. The episode of the Weston ball, touched on with apologies by Sybil, proved a source of mirth.

"What possessed me to act so?" she wondered. "It was my fault we didn't hit it off. I'm not surprised you thought me a fool. I should have known you weren't the sort to flirt with."

"Tell me," he demanded, when she had remounted and was preparing to gallop away, "do you come here often?"

She hesitated. "Do you?"

"To-day is the first time for me this season."

"I come here every day," she said.

She had not realized, until after she had spoken, that she so obviously liked him.

"I shall come here every day," he returned.

As she wheeled her horse about, the faintest of blushes, stealing over her pallor, rewarded him.

CHAPTER V

A WEEK passed. Mrs. Sloane's visits to the sick-room became less frequent. This caused no surprise. The nurses and physicians had been quite certain, from the beginning, that she would inevitably get impatient, sooner or later, with the weary routine; indeed, the verdict of Tim's attendants was that she had held out extremely well.

Mrs. Sloane had rearranged her daily schedule. She reverted to the old habit of breakfasting in bed and rising at eleven. Noon found her with her husband for a perfunctory half-hour. Then, until luncheon, she would be shut in the music-room; her accompanist had been recalled from a vacation induced by Tim's illness. Sybil loved this morning practice; and she had once thought of her singing as the hardest of tasks! Luncheon over, she again soothed Tim by her passive presence, this time for precisely an hour. The rest of the afternoon would be occupied by her ride—and incidentally by her meeting with Mallory. For years she had neglected her reading; the long evenings enabled her to catch up a bit. Sometimes, if she became very much engrossed, Tim had to go without the balm of her influence, without her sweetly breathed good night; at best, he would get but a fleeting peek at her.

It was taken for granted now that Sloane would recover—that is, it was taken for granted by everyone but Sloane himself. He tried his feeble best to put out his cheeks in scorn, whenever he heard a cheering word about his remarkable improvement. He was done for, he felt convinced. Nothing could shake that decision. As his mind grew clearer, he began to brood. During the period of Sybil's sweetest ministrations he had been unconscious. Her defection was almost the first thing he had been able to get with precision. His anger rose against her; a great part of his time was occupied by silent cursing.

One evening, when Sybil bent over him prettily to whisper good-night, he stammered out a peremptory command.

"I want to talk to you—*alone*," was what it came to.

Sybil shook her head. "You mustn't wear yourself out," she admonished him.

Then she sped back to her reading.

The next morning, Sybil found one of the doctors leaning over Tim. With a nod of understanding, he straightened and bowed his greeting.

"Mr. Sloane wants to talk; he has

something to tell you," the man explained. "It won't hurt him the least bit, I'm sure."

She sat down beside the bed and bent her head to listen. The sound of a door closing told her the doctor had hustled the nurse out.

Tim spoke with prodigious effort. When he had finished, Sybil sat quite motionless. The effort to make out the words had been trying; often they had become choked by the superfluous sounds that accompanied them. It had been so difficult to grasp, syllable by syllable, what he articulated that she had somehow let the meaning of it all escape her. With Tim lying quiet again at last, she closed her eyes and placed the fragmentary utterances together. She went over the narration in her mind, moving her lips silently:

"'You have been no wife for a man; a man's *got* to have an heir.'"

Why should Timothy Sloane crave a son, she asked herself; could he think it tragic that the Sloane line should become extinct?

"'I am going to tell you something—not any damned confession; I'm not ashamed of this. I've got a son; I'm going to make him my heir. You'll get more money than you want, anyhow; he'll take my name and his share of the estate. Legal adoption—that's my plan. It won't take much time or energy. I can last till it's over. I am *proud;* I mean to let people know he is my own.'"

She opened her eyes suddenly; the droop of exhaustion was gone and her face became brightly alert.

"Tim," she queried with distinctness, "how old is your son?"

"Three years," he returned.

Sybil with difficulty suppressed a smile; the situation began to assume a comic value.

She rose.

"I understand perfectly," she said in gentle tones.

Tim had expected tears of protest and cries of humiliation. The prospect of Sybil's prostration had impelled him to act on his son's behalf quite as much as the stir of parental affection for the strapping infant. The scheme of adoption would probably never have occurred to him if he had not been for a week in a perpetual fume of rage against his wife.

Worn out by his exertion, he lay and panted; he confessed himself puzzled at Sybil's gentle calm. He *did* not understand; perhaps if he could have realized that he was not on his death-bed he would not have been so at sea.

As Sybil, gliding away, reached the door, Tim played his trump card.

"The mother's name is Mary Sullivan." He threw this from him like a missile.

"I understand perfectly," his wife repeated and disappeared.

Tim frowned. He had been quite sure she would crumple up in agony at mention of the dreadful name. His enthusiasm had dropped; he determined to postpone the plan of adoption.

That afternoon Sybil, while her hair was being dressed for riding, hummed to herself, broke into fluty whistles and chattered at a headlong rate to her maid. All at once she began to shake with uncontrollable laughter; she tossed off a perfect star-shower of silver peals.

Sybil's mirth was contagious; the maid smiled broadly.

"*Ah, la chose se complique,*" remarked Sybil. "*On ne sait ce que l'on fait; on est très-parfaitement absurd. Ce sera tout bénéfice pour moi.*" She was enigmatic.

"*Mais oui!*" agreed the maid, at a loss.

A week later Sybil, assured by the doctor that her husband could get along for a few days without her, went to New York. Tim stormed and blustered during her absence; he was confident the visit meant a mourning outfit.

Sybil returned in a jubilant spirit. Her lawyer had been sanguine. The matter could be despatched with speed and ridiculous ease, he had asserted. Tim, once he was on his feet, would be handed the papers he himself had made it so easy to put into shape.

Meantime, his wife would go quietly to work, getting things ship-shape for a solitary trip abroad. It might take a twelvemonth, she decided, before people would consider she had altogether recuperated from the protracted lapse of the past five years.

CHAPTER VI

THE divorce was happily free from all spectacular features, if one failed to take into consideration the unprecedented size of the alimony. That sum had set the entire country to gasping, Tim himself not excepted. Otherwise, proceedings had been quiet and unostentatious, "like a house wedding," as Reggie Fleet put it.

Sybil had suffered moments of terror at the thought of the tantrums Tim might give way to; but he had been positively stunned by the affair. He had not regained his breath until it was all over. When he did recover from the shock, he at last found himself accepting dumbly the fact that he must be getting well. A man hovering between life and death of course would have succumbed in short order. Sybil had informed the world, in a manner not at all to Tim's liking, that the Sloane line had an heir after a fashion. The infant's mother had testified in a vein eminently satisfactory to the wronged wife. The idea of legal adoption was set aside with promptness by Tim.

Sybil, trailing clouds of alimony (this a mot of Nora Willoughby's), set a straight course for Florence. Paris, the Riviera—she had dismissed them decisively as too conspicuous.

"Above *all*, not Egypt!" reflected Sybil.

The year in Italy was to be a veritable retirement from the world; no composer, however, keeping his prima donna out of things for an act or two, ever had his audience more squarely before his mind's eye than had Sybil at this time. The months of self-effacement were, quite frankly, a sort of cocoon period in her career, a preparation for the imminent flash of gorgeous wings.

She felt, to be sure, by no means grubby or bored. It was all perfectly fascinating—if one kept in mind that it would not last.

Sybil was happy, ecstatic in her new power of free flight. Besides, she loved Italy; the chilliness of its winter climate was more than atoned for by the warm glow of its pictures. Renaissance art thrilled her; but, since it spurred her to the liveliest enthusiasm, the necessity of merely gazing in silence irked her.

She wanted to communicate the clever things that frolicked through her mind. It was hard to stand still until one's neck got stiff; it would have been such a delight to break into odd, fantastic gestures, to gossip and poke delicate fun even at the works that most enraptured one. A courtship carried on under the sympathetic stare of Italian Virgins would be something of a lark, she thought more than once.

Sybil was constantly chuckling over her quaint little blasphemies in the presence of masterpieces. The Christ Child seldom struck her as anything but ridiculous. He so often bore a grotesque resemblance to people she knew. The divine infant in the Magnificat Tondo, for example, was like a delicious caricature of Mallory; the discovery sent her home one day in a gay mood.

Mallory was a faithful correspondent. His letters were always extremely long and written with the precision and neatness to be expected of him. The style sometimes became involved; but he could be counted on for the most part to say a thing well.

Sybil knew, whenever she tore open an envelope of his, that she was going to be interested; at times she was even charmed. The epistles she sent off to him in return were usually brilliant and cryptic. It was impossible for her to be straightforward on paper. She was so impatient, so eager to score that her self-consciousness showed in what she wrote.

It was a habit with her to go over her letters just to pick out the places where she fancied she had made

palpable hits and to see if every paragraph contained its proper share of wit. Her handwriting was characteristic and yet conventional. The vast majority of pretty, fragile women splash ink about and construct enormous characters with an attempt at the masculine touch; the result is apt to be undecipherable and exquisitely feminine.

Sybil's chirography was amazing. There was a scenic dash to it; the capitals were, one might almost say, pyrotechnical. She did not like to write letters. It was a proof of her substantial admiration for Mallory that she never let more than three of his epistles arrive before replying. Mallory did not take her erratic responses in this way; he feared she was neglecting him.

He had left the United States in August. London and Paris occupied him for a time. When the winter air began to nip, he took himself off to Cannes. Not before the end of a month there did he summon sufficient courage to slip over into Italy. At the end of a letter to Sybil he touched, absurdly casual, on his intention. She was still in Florence; with unaccustomed promptness she bestirred herself to urge on him a stop there.

"You must see my cypresses; and I do want to gush in somebody's presence — yours will be just what I'm after—over Benozzo's hobby-horsical Epiphany."

He did view her among her cypresses; he lingered, in fact, for a week. They went at a furious pace. Mallory, a man of studied deliberateness, was quite worn out on his departure.

Sybil took everything at top speed; it never occurred to her to leave off chattering musically when they got inside a cathedral. The constant flow of engaging talk did not weary Mallory; he soon found, to his bewilderment, that Florence with all it contained was beginning to sink for him into a mere background for the absorbing Mrs. Sloane. He could scarcely believe credible such unfaithfulness to the beloved Florence.

They found much to argue over. She would have none of the austere Brancacci Chapel; she would not listen to the indignant arguments he presented in favour of "The Tribute Money." Benozzo's delightful Adoration in the Palazzo's Riccardi; the Fra Angelicos in San Marco; above all, Botticelli—these she never tired of.

"I insist on *charm*," she announced one day as they strolled in the Uffizi. "Majesty and dignity and all that—no, I don't see it. Brightness and radiance and grace—I call such qualities life-heightening."

"Life-heightening! The words are the words of Berenson," he mocked.

"Yes, I read what the critics have to say. I pick up some of their phrases, too." She was unabashed.

"What do you say to the Sistine Ceiling? You condemn it, don't you?"

"Certainly not. I think it has decided charm," she parried.

"I understand." He gave her a slow smile. "Your *charm* is an elastic term. What you like has charm; what you don't like has none."

"Yes. I consider things for what they give *me;* I don't judge for other people. That is, I try not to. I do forget, don't I? I've done my best to convert you, to make you like only what I like; but you are very stubborn."

"About charm," he persisted. "If a painting repels you, doesn't it ever assert a baleful power?"

"It does. It has in that case a hideous charm." She laughed. "Don't try to argue with me," she warned him. "I seldom mean what I say; and I never know, really, what I'm talking about."

"You are a Protean artist in argument, rather," he corrected her. "Isn't our idea, after all—?"

But she was not listening. She had stopped before the Magnificat Tondo. Mallory could see she was biting her lips in the vain effort to keep back a smile.

"What is it?" he asked. Then, "So even Botticelli tickles you at times. You *are* incorrigible."

"My smile was one of the fondest affection," she asserted. "I adore that

baby. He is so like—a dear friend of mine." She could not resist a mocking grimace.

Mallory caught what the look conveyed. He blushed and smiled. Perceiving the resemblance between himself and the nude infant, he could not help feeling as if he had left his clothes at home and were standing before her naked and ashamed.

"So I *am* a dear friend?" he asked, his ludicrous embarrassment conquered.

"As if you did not know!" she answered.

It was not until Mallory's return northward from Rome that he and Sybil became engaged. She had left Florence; it was at Verona she accepted him.

"Why Verona?" he queried as they sat at tea in her huge draughty drawing-room.

"Why not Verona? I think it's fascinating, though the cold is trying at first."

"It's easy to guess what brought you here," he said. "You probably dote on Pisanello."

"Such scorn!" she mocked. "But I'm not ashamed. He is adorable; he is," she hesitated, "a darling."

"Fancy a Pisanello pilgrimage!" Mallory voiced his scorn.

"I *knew* you'd say just that. Wait! You've never seen the fresco in Sant Anastasia."

"Neither have you—*really*. The fool painted it way up near the roof where nobody could see it."

"Very well," she pouted. "I shall send you out to look at the amphitheatre or to go through the barracks one hears so much about while I worship at San Fermo or Sant Anastasia."

"I do want to see the Francesco Morone Crucifixion," he announced.

She shuddered. "I detest that painting."

"You should detest all crucifixions," he reminded her. "Surely you don't look for charm in crucifixions?"

"I do. Moreover, I often find it—in the best crucifixions." Thus she silenced him.

At luncheon the next day they were radiant.

"Do you know," remarked Sybil, "I think it was extremely delicate and sweet and delightful of you to propose at the feet of St. George and the Princess of Trebizond."

"I waited until I saw you in your most melting mood," he replied. "I knew you couldn't refuse me at that moment—or any other fellow, I'm afraid."

CHAPTER VII

SYBIL and Mallory were married in London on the last day of March. They sailed at once for New York. The middle of April found them in Newport. Mallory owned a charming cottage on the Cliffs, an old-fashioned and inconspicuous house that had aged gracefully. He had never been rich enough to afford the alterations necessary to bring the place up to date; besides, he much preferred it just as it was, anyhow. Sybil agreed with him when he asked if she didn't think it quite perfect; her acquiescence was, however, distinctly not enthusiastic.

"Ah, you don't like it!" he exclaimed.

"I do—awfully," she replied, with a straight drop into relenting sweetness. "I only thought—"

"Yes?" he politely urged.

"Well, it's so beautifully rambling we could run a ballroom out from this end with ease. Then we could build one of those big porches along the water side and it would be ideal for entertaining." She gave him an eager smile. "Wouldn't it be jolly? With the moss green roof and the rest that dark brown"—she pointed it out—"a ballroom would look as if it had always been there. It wouldn't hurt the general effect in the slightest; it would add a touch if anything."

Mallory shook his head with a gently paternal smile; he had already learned to accept the fact that his wife was a spoiled child. He loved her the better for that.

"Now please be frank," said Sybil. "I love the place this way; it satisfies

me. It is your house and I don't wish to change anything unless *you* feel it would be an improvement."

"Sybil, dear," Mallory responded, "I've for years been longing for a ballroom right on the spot you indicate. And a porch—the wide kind on the water side—*the* thing!"

His sarcasm never came at one like a rapier thrust. It was merely his way of giving in a point, but of giving in with a delicate hint that he was by no means hoodwinked.

Sybil appreciated this. He had accepted her plan.

"Let's send for an architect at once," she urged. "We can get it done in no time at all. It will be finished before the season begins." She looked at him tenderly; the expression of mingled exultation and guilt on her face made her irresistible. "I shall never, *never* forgive myself if I think you are doing this against your will. I can't make out whether you are holding back or not. It is so hard to get at you."

"I am exceedingly enthusiastic," he protested. "All joking aside, your idea is a splendid one. Two or three chaps —architects too—have told me as much before; it would make it easier to rent, don't you see, if I should ever want to."

He lied glibly.

"We must get to work," she exclaimed in delight.

Sybil, during the period of voluntary exile, had been keeping her audience in mind. She knew that as Mrs. Frederick Mallory she could count on a welcome of warmth from Society. Everybody loved Mallory; no list of guests for an affair of any sort was without his name.

People, without the slightest cause, had for years felt sorry for "poor dear Freddie"; perhaps it was because they could not get over the idea that there must be something dismal and pitiable about such unbending respectability. Whatever the motives of Mallory's friends, they were careful not to let him out of their sight. He was precisely the husband for Sybil's purpose. At the end of the first year of her life with him she should emerge on the crest of the glittering wave; of her triumph there could be no doubt, she assured herself.

She had therefore thoroughly ransacked Paris before running over to London for the marriage. The wardrobe with which the Frederick Mallorys embarked at Liverpool was indeed extraordinary. Every dressmaker on the Rue de la Paix must have risen to new heights of splendid achievement, Mallory decided; for Sybil had with infantile delight displayed the entire dazzling array for his benefit. He had been set blinking. The gowns seemed like bright blossoms too fantastic for this earth, too delicate to withstand the touch of a man's hand; and the hats, perched all about him, were like enormous birds, bigger and more brilliant than those of Paradise, that had alighted in the florid bower.

Sybil had quite honestly warned him, months before, what to expect. He had accepted with alacrity the responsibilities any husband of hers would incur.

"I know, I know," he had said. "It will be the case of Aunt Alice all over again. You are going in for the business of entertaining. I am content; but Sybil—one favour I beg. Let me have you absolutely to myself for three months. After that, I swear I won't interfere. You may go your maddest and merriest from the first of July; until then, leave things to me. It is a go?"

"It is a go," Sybil had echoed. "Listen to me, while I tell you a wonderful scheme. Three—oh, four—months of *every* year shall be yours; the rest will be mine. That will suit us both, won't it?"

"Perfectly!"

"What are we booked for, those first three months of our married life? Or haven't you decided?" She showed a lively curiosity.

"We shall settle down in my house at Newport for the Spring."

She rewarded him with a radiant smile. "It will be absurd but delightful."

So they spent a quiet three months at Newport. Sybil knew that her hus-

band worshipped her. On her side, she found him a companion who interested her and won her liveliest esteem. Nobody could have been less stiff and pedantic than Frederick Mallory once he had been warmed to enthusiasm. It would never have occurred to Sybil to consider herself in love. There was something so matter-of-fact in her acceptance of intimacy with him that she could not bring herself to think this charming state of affection for the man a grand passion.

July came. The stage was set; and Sybil Mallory felt her blood stir as if in response to a high challenge. The old craving for things theatrical and spectacular asserted itself. The impending début in Brussels years ago had scared her too much to awake real inspiration.

Now, however, she trembled with joy each morning as she dipped into her wardrobe and peeked at its splendours. The ballroom was finished; everyone had to acknowledge that it could not have been done in better taste. The big porch, with its expanse of polished floor, ran around three sides of the house. Mallory's modest establishment had been transformed. It was still wonderfully adapted to cosy dinners; on the other hand, by the simple expedient of throwing open a few doors, it could accommodate the throngs a big entertainment would bring together. Mallory himself was delighted at this proof of his wife's genius.

One morning he discovered her in the act of leaning out at a perilous angle from her bedroom window.

"Fred," she said, "has anybody bought the Hollis place yet?"

The vast, untenanted Hollis estate adjoined Mallory's. Sybil had been risking her neck to get a good look at the mansion.

"Good Heavens, Sybil!" he exclaimed. "You're not pining—?"

She laughed gaily. "Certainly not! I've just been comparing it with our lovely place and thinking how horrid and ugly it was. I've been almost sticking out my tongue at it."

Mallory beamed.

"You frightened me for the moment," he confided.

"The strange part of it is," she said, "that I made poor Tim miserable last summer simply because he refused to buy that house."

She turned away from the window.

"Oh, if you only *knew* how happy I am!" she cried.

CHAPTER VIII

It was quite the gayest season Newport cottagers could recall. The indefatigable Sybil set the pace; she went about it so skilfully that people did not realize, until Fall was upon them, that it was she who had at the very beginning of the Summer dashed ahead and whistled them all, panting in pursuit, to her heels. It was too late then to demur; indeed, very few would have been inclined to grumble, so refreshing and charming was this newcomer. Hot Springs in September received a gasping throng from Newport; it took one a month there to get one's breath.

Sybil herself had never given in to weariness. She could sparkle at a dinner, then dance all night, and still report by ten-thirty in the morning at the Casino for a game of tennis; noon would see her immersed in the ocean at Bailey's. Her repartee at luncheon was unfailingly bright. If she took a nap in the afternoon, it must have been but a few winks; for she seldom went without a ride or a drive or a game of golf.

The townspeople felt that a day had failed if they got no glimpse, on Bellevue Avenue, of the fascinating creature and her untiring escorts, Frederick Mallory and Reginald Fleet. It was a question in the minds of the men in the shops which picture was the more satisfying: the lady on horseback and laughing with Fleet, while her husband lagged a bit behind, or the lady in her motor, a vision of black eyes and white lace, between the two men, with a sunshade poised in a way that left poor Mallory delicately out of things.

The mention of Fleet always occa-

sioned a melancholy headshake in a group of gossiping tradesmen. It was too bad—Mallory was such a fine fellow! And yet, they would not have altered the situation; it savoured so decidedly of the romantic and the wicked as it was. It was a satisfaction, moreover, to behold Mrs. Willoughby forlorn at the defection of Fleet. Mrs. Willoughby, once championed by all shopkeepers, had suffered eclipse. Mrs. Tim Sloane—so they still called Sybil—was not merely the more beautiful of the two women; she could be counted on to pay her bills. And of course that implied Fleet's bills, too!

It was true that Sybil and Fleet had become alarmingly intimate. Their relations were commented on everywhere, by people of their own set as well as by the underlings. Sybil, Mallory and Fleet were perhaps the only people in Newport who knew just how far matters had progressed; and of these three, Fleet was the one who was not perfectly content.

The very day he arrived at Newport he sprang clear of the crowd at Sybil's heels; and throughout the exhilarating season he had kept almost even with her in the race. He was always near; the two were delighted with each other. Mallory did not attempt to keep up with them. The serenity with which he dropped back caused universal wonder. People had no time, however, for clear thinking; and before they got an opportunity to condemn Sybil they found themselves liking her and mutely deciding to overlook any indiscretions.

Besides, for Mallory's sake, it was up to them to keep quiet and not pry.

Chatter, that periodical of gossipy cynicism, began to level shafts at Sybil and Fleet. Nobody could deny the cleverness and the fastidious charm of style that characterized every issue of this scandalous sheet. There was something gracefully libellous about it; an Addison in the devil's pay might have written the terse paragraphs it contained. *Chatter* aired its depravity with an insolence positively Wildean. It recounted the ripening and the rotting of fashionable intrigues; and it did so by the aid of writing so lucid and pure as to o'erleap its purpose and become finicky.

Fleet had for years been one of *Chatter's* long-suffering victims. His escapades had been touched on time and again, and with ever-increasing mordacity. He had come to represent in people's minds a sort of Saint Sebastian, lifted naked on high and riddled by the arrows of sarcasm and ridicule. His affair with Nora Willoughby, most charming of widows, had been commented on with frequency during the years of its duration.

And now, directly he picked out Sybil Mallory for his attentions, *Chatter* went at the attack with a delicacy and beauty of phrasing that made each compact essay on the subject a masterpiece of its kind.

Sybil, very much against Mallory's wishes, perused every number of *Chatter*. If she found herself pilloried, she would seek out her husband, corner him and read aloud the account of her pretty sinfulness.

Mallory would protest, but to no purpose. He was forced without appeal to hear the thing through.

"I *want* you to know all this," she would announce. "A man should realize how people talk. Not only that! He should watch his wife constantly. If you let me run about loose you may find, all of a sudden, that you're jealous."

"You know I shan't ever be jealous of *you*," he returned.

"Probably not," she admitted. "Still, please watch me, just the same. It will make me feel so much freer to do as I wish."

As Mrs. Tim Sloane, Sybil had read *Chatter* faithfully. It had seemed then somehow a mark of social prominence, a privilege to have one's name whispered from its columns. There was still a trace of that feeling, a not unpleasant thrill, when she came upon an allusion to herself. She realized it was vulgar.

Sybil, trained for the stage, could

not live without publicity. In an opera house she would have sung for the highest gallery as well as for the boxes. In social life, therefore, it was but natural that she should play for everybody. She had wanted most of all in her student days to sing Manon and Violetta, and here she was doing the same sort of thing, masquerading as a delightful wanton before the people she knew and the people she didn't know.

One night at Nora Willoughby's house, Sybil and Fleet, confessing to each other a desire for some place of intimate solitude, slipped away from the dance. They strolled across the lawn to the Cliffs and down a broad slant of cement walk leading to a little beach.

"What's the point of that walk anyhow?" asked Reggie. "I'm sure we're the first ones here in an age."

"Don't you know?" Sybil laughed. "It is not edifying. It is used to cart rubbish down."

The man shook his head.

"My God!" he wailed. "The money it cost would settle my bills so nicely! I never heard of such extravagance. It makes me furious."

"Reggie, *why* don't you get married? There are so many pretty girls and women in love with you." Sybil liked to worry him with advice.

"Because—for the hundredth time! —I prefer my creditors to a woman I couldn't shake off."

He fixed her with a glare that softened to an appeal.

"But that's not my only reason—now," he went on. "You know, you know; don't deny it, Sybil."

"What makes a rock so comfortable?" she asked, as if it interested her. "Upholstery can't touch it." And she settled herself with a sigh of content on the surface of smooth stone.

Fleet dropped into place beside her. They talked on and on and smoked cigarettes. Sybil all the while toyed with the feather fan she held. She would silently ruffle it, then bring it daintily into play. The next moment it would cease fluttering and sink to her breast like a great white tremulous bird. She had the situation in perfect control; when the man showed a flash of angry ardour, she got up quickly.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed and spread the fan as for flight. "We've been here an outrageous time."

She swayed a little; entangled in the mazes of her train, she had lost her balance. A pretty cry of mingled amusement and fright escaped her. The next moment she had fallen straight into his arms. In a flash she had regained her footing and drawn away. Reginald deliberately let her hear the profanity he treated himself to.

"I beg your pardon!" Sybil apologized coolly. "I shall never get used to this gown, I'm afraid."

A few minutes later she came up to him in the ballroom.

"*Could* you go down to that wretched little beach again?" she asked. "I've dropped my fan somewhere. I think it must have been on the rocks."

When Fleet returned, Sybil greeted him with a flourish of white feathers.

"I am so glad it's been found," he exclaimed. "Needless to say, it wasn't where you suggested. I've been prowling about the grounds after the lovely thing."

"A footman came in dangling it," she explained. "Isn't it peculiar? I am confident I put it beside me on the rocks; and I remember taking it up and playing with it. I *know* I dropped it as I tumbled."

"I wonder what the fellow's up to," commented Fleet, "and what he was doing on that beach? They don't cart rubbish at this time of night, surely."

Sybil was not at all surprised to find the incident touched on in the next *Chatter:*

"There is a rumour," *the article began with the discussion of an entertainment Mrs. Weston was planning*, "that we are to have a performance for charity soon at Freebody Park—one of those delightful occasions, you know, when the actors reap glory and the orphan asylum, or whatever it is that is supposed to benefit, receives but a meagre shower of coins into its coffers. Not that the affair will be a freeze-out; we hasten to protest against any such surmise. The boxes and seats will, without a doubt, all be sold for

incredible sums. The point is, so much money will be spent on making certain a brilliant representation that the profits will find their way into the pockets of professional coaches, scenic artists and decorators.

"We admit this arrangement rather pleases us. Warm winter clothes for the orphans would doubtless be more abundantly forthcoming if the services of Mr. Gerard, the trainer, were dispensed with; but for our part we can't help feeling the play's the thing. We applaud the ladies who insist on proper rehearsing; the thought of a few foundlings relieved from shivering on this earth would not be sufficient to make us view unperturbed the lamentable spectacle of Mrs. Mallory inadequately prepared for her rôle.

"Taking it for granted that you are not ignorant of the conventions of performances for charity, we assume you have guessed by this time whose the delightful drama will be—yes, of course, Oscar Wilde's. No band of altruistic and wealthy amateurs ever chooses a play by anybody else. The comedy we shall witness will be '*Lady Windermere's Fan*.' It is said the woman who has been swept into prominence this year on the current of alimony—the neglected Mrs. Tim Sloane of a twelvemonth back—will grace the part of Mrs. Erlynne. Mrs. Mallory is one of the few people still young enough to confess on the stage to a grown-up daughter without fearing smirks and smothered guffaws from the audience. She should triumph as the adventuress, if only for the reason that she wields the éventail so adroitly.

"You know the story of the lost fan? More than one of Mrs. Willoughby's guests last week, finding the ball-room stuffy, strolled out into the night for a glimpse of the moon on the water. It may have occurred to some that the pretty, secluded beach below the brink afforded a delightful retreat.

"Cottagers in Newport, however, are celebrated for their discretion—so far as others are concerned. The sight of two points of flame, one unwavering—the light from the cigarette of a man at gaze, assuredly—the other darting and curvetting with the vivacity of a fire-fly, warned travellers off the rocks. There were moments, of course, when these small beacons suffered extinguishment; but nobody considered that as a signal to descend. The feeling seemed to be that at such a time visitors might be more than ever unwelcome. As the night wore on, two figures were seen to ascend from the haven of solitude; the lunar beams, dancing playfully over the surface of a back bared to the moon, put all doubts in regard to the woman's identity at rest.

"The beach was now deserted. The two tiny flames no longer glowed. 'But what is that spread out on the rocks like a great dead swan?' people ask. The question remains unanswered.

"Later a man is descried hurrying towards the spot. It is Reggie Fleet; one might have known! He returns, a worried frown on his forehead; he has been unable to find what he was after—that is quite obvious. Who has been before him? Who has captured the feathery mass? Ah, dear reader, if we were to let fall that information, we should be dropping our mask.

"In the ball-room a plaintive voice is heard above the music. 'Has anyone seen my white fan?' asks Mrs. Freddie Mallory.

"A footman enters, half hidden in the ruffled plumes; Mrs. Mallory makes for him and seizes on the prize.

"Who has put the thing into his hand?

"He shakes his head; he does not know the lady's name."

CHAPTER IX

THE performance of "Lady Windermere's Fan" was scheduled for the night preceding the last day of the Horse Show. A dance at the Frederick Mallory's would complete the evening and incidentally treat the guests to a view of the sun rising on the last day of the season. Sybil and her husband planned to leave Newport directly the house had been swept clear of the festive frippery. After three months in Paris they would hasten back to New York. At the beginning of Lent Mallory, with his wife's consent, would take matters into his own hands.

"It's as if I had one innings out of the nine all my own," he remarked in sportsmanlike jargon.

"I have an idea you are going to hustle me back to Italy." Sybil tried her best to conceal the fact that she was dropping a hint.

She failed to deceive him.

To his amused lift of the eyebrows she responded by bursting into merry laughter.

People had feared from the moment "Lady Windermere's Fan" had been chosen that the assigning of the women's parts would be the occasion for squabbles. Sybil was everywhere voted an ideal Mrs. Erlynne. Fleet and Mallory alone demurred, backing each other up in furious protest.

It was preposterous, they insisted; maturity and artfully compressed fleshiness were necessary, in order to make the woman a plausible figure. They

begged Mrs. Weston to take the rôle. They were overruled in short order. No matter what arguments a dramatist may put forward to the contrary, his adventuress should be slender and girlish and above all the possessor of big eyes —such was the verdict on every side. So Sybil was cast for Mrs. Erlynne. She was overjoyed.

Nora Willoughby's delight at being asked to do Lady Windermere brought a gasp of relief.

Nora had been throughout the season a puzzle. The yielding womanliness that had always made her so charming and restful was perceptibly giving place to frank bad temper. Her pretty purring, her air of basking for ever in the warm sun, had ceased to be habitual. She was often cross now. She snapped too and at times seemed positively to be indulging in a faint growl.

But then, this new attitude was not to be wondered at. The poor thing was hopelessly in debt. She had lately taken to inviting impossible men to her place for week-ends. She kept them carefully concealed, to be sure; but, considering the state of her finances, it was illuminating to find out that these guests were unfailingly of prodigious prosperity. Could she be bringing herself to the point of contemplating another dip into matrimony? One wondered.

With Sybil in particular Nora bridled and quarrelled; that, too, was condoned. Fleet was to blame there. People had always imagined Nora would become cloyingly sweet and wistful under a misfortune; it was refreshing to feel her claws.

"I swear it's rather jolly to see her spit out," cried Mrs. Weston with her usual disconcerting vulgarity.

To Muriel Winton had been entrusted the delicate mission of sounding Nora on the subject of Lady Windermere.

"We can't ignore her," Mrs. Weston opined. "As it is, I don't expect to get any rent out of her for that house of mine she's living in; but if she gets hot, she won't even pay her bridge debts. Then we should *all* get left. So do be careful."

"She was tickled to death!" Muriel voiced her amazement when she entered the Casino the next morning.

"I know why!" Sybil suddenly saw it all. "I wager Nora has never even read the play. Naturally she thinks she'll be the heroine and make a great stir."

"Prepare to look around for another Lady Windermere," advised Fleet. "As soon as Nora does read it she'll back out."

But Nora did not back out. She attended every rehearsal; furthermore, she succeeded in making the priggish character charming. Her comments on the others' success with their parts were sometimes caustic; but on the whole she let out less frequently than had been her custom in the last few months.

"It seems to me," she remarked once, appealing to Mr. Gerard, the coach, "that Mrs. Mallory doesn't make her epigrams sound spontaneous. Doesn't she—er—get out of the picture and toss them across the footlights? It must be hard to say so many clever things—I realize that—and not want to impress them on the audience. Of course, I haven't that difficulty. Lady Windermere has no wit. But isn't there something?—it's hard to express it—"

Mr. Gerard agreed; Nora's criticism was justifiable. Sybil had been scoring her points too obviously. Her acting had something in common with her letter-writing.

When the coach, however, made a tentative plea for more self-effacement, Sybil became furious. She refused to have her conception of the part interfered with. A quarrel resulted. Mallory, Fleet and Muriel Winton had called their utmost skill into play before the thing was settled. When the rehearsal had been resumed, these three, Sybil's staunchest champions, confessed to each other in the low tones of conspirators that she really *did* overdo it.

"She will make it worse now deliberately," said Muriel. "Can't you talk to her, Fred, and make her see?"

"I'm afraid not." Mallory shook his head and smiled. "It's her operatic training."

"Well, now that she's heard Gerard on the subject, it will be her own deviliishness if she keeps it up," announced Muriel.

"Do look," whispered Fleet. "I only hope on the night of the show she won't fall off the stage and land on the bass-drum."

They giggled as Fleet, responding to his cue, entered upon the scene. Muriel and Mallory were to appear only as guests at Lady Windermere's birthday dance; they therefore found much time to loiter about in the offing and discuss Sybil. Mallory liked nothing better than to talk of his wife to Miss Winton. He knew she shared his enthusiasm on that point.

Sybil and Muriel had in a short time become intimate. There was in their friendship no element of rivalry. Muriel was quiet and serious. She looked her best on the tennis-court; she never was at ease in an evening gown. As an athlete, nobody could touch her. In any tournament, she received the enthusiastic attention of all Newport; but somehow people forgot her once the dinner hour arrived.

This did not discourage Muriel; she accepted it philosophically. Sybil, without knowing why, had the greatest affection for her; if she had analysed the feeling with critical acumen, she would have found she liked the girl simply because her nature so resembled Mallory's. Muriel faced the world with a silent diffidence of attitude; she appeared awkward and stupid to all but the people she knew best. When stirred into enthusiasm, however, she made a delightful companion.

Sybil's most conspicuous failing was her habit of ineffectual matchmaking. She attacked Muriel one day.

"You're well over twenty," she remarked, "and you are much too nice to stay single. Why not give somebody a chance at you?"

Muriel smiled. "But I am perfectly happy as I am. I don't want to get married."

"Of course I know that," Sybil assured her. "If you *had* ever wanted to, I shouldn't be scolding about it to-day."

"That's very sweet," said Muriel.

"The trouble is, you treat every man as if you were facing him over a net. You keep him in constant dread of your fore-arm stroke."

"I prefer men at a distance," pronounced Muriel.

"They are sometimes great fun close to," Sybil persisted. "Try falling in love, Muriel. You can't do it at long-distance, though."

"I never heard that before!" the girl laughingly protested.

"I know you hear about such cases; but things of that sort never happen to those one knows." Sybil was incisive.

"The trouble with you, my dear," said Muriel, "is that you know nothing of men at long distance. The men themselves see to that."

"If you spend your time ridiculing men and marriage, you will find, when you want to fall in love, that you won't dare to." Sybil dropped the subject with a smile that was half a pout.

Muriel was silent for a moment.

Then, "Sybil," she said, "why do you spend so much time with Reggie Fleet? I like you both so much that I hate to hear people talking."

"Reggie and I get on so beautifully," Sybil explained. "Why shouldn't we see each other often? And it makes no difference to me what people say, so long as my husband trusts me. If *he* were jealous, I should stop seeing Reggie. I've made Fred promise to tell me the moment he begins to get uneasy."

"You are right, I suppose," Muriel answered. "Still, *is* Fred the only one to consider?"

Sybil's eyes showed a gleam of merriment.

"You can't mean that I'm hurting Reggie's good name?" she cried.

"Be serious, Sybil." Muriel smiled in spite of her earnestness. "I mean that you can't ignore people successfully. You aren't discreet, are you? Don't you do things that you know will be talked about?"

Sybil nodded.

"Oh, yes!" She shrugged and grimaced at Muriel. "Sometimes I do things just for that reason."

"Well, then," Muriel pounced, "you deserve all the nasty remarks that are made about you."

"I do believe you have been reading *Chatter*," announced Sybil.

"Good gracious, no!" Muriel was emphatic. "Father wouldn't let the horrid magazine in the house. He sued *Chatter* some years ago, you know, and won, too. Think how they love us. That's why we are so careful now; we know the roasting in store for us if we side-step once."

"It is up to you, Muriel, to stop all this scandal about Reggie and me."

Sybil leaned forward and patted Muriel's knee as she spoke.

"It's up to you!" she repeated. "Smile at Reggie a few times, give him a little encouragement; and—when he proposes, take him. It will be easy for you, I haven't a doubt!"

"It *would* be easy to bag Reggie," Muriel mocked.

Sybil, engrossed in lighting a cigarette, followed it out. "I should feel then that he was practically in the family. You could lend him to me as often as I wanted him."

In triumph she clouded the air with smoke and smiled at Muriel.

The poor girl was blushing hotly; Sybil had never before seen a tide of blood so violent in any woman's face. For a second she was frankly alarmed.

Then she hastened to look away.

"Reggie is quite boyish in some respects," she pursued, not daring to change the subject.

"He is just the type to fall head over heels in love, all of a sudden," she wound up.

Delicately she veered to "Lady Windermere." After a time, stealing a peek at Muriel, she perceived the girl's face had regained its customary ruddy hue.

Sybil, thinking over the painful moment when she was alone, found her pity for Muriel's plight less vivid than a feeling of disappointment at the ludicrous betrayal of it. Sybil did not bother her head to think up an explanation other than the conventionally romantic one—*this* was without question an involuntary confession of love; she had always pictured a sudden pallor, followed by a fainting-fit, in such a situation. She could not help smiling. It was pathetic; but, alas, it was also farcical. It was certainly by no means in accordance with operatic traditions.

CHAPTER X

THE day of "Lady Windermere" arrived. Sybil and her husband left the Horse Show in the middle of the afternoon. There were still those last deft touches to be given to the ballroom decorations, those finishing strokes that a conscientious hostess never leaves to the florist. Mallory would be of no use whatever; that he knew; but he wanted to watch.

Outside the Casino they were obliged to wait a moment while the motor was brought round. On either side of the entrance was a closely packed throng of people whom the policemen with difficulty kept in order. The eager, curious crowds of Newport that one knows nothing about always flock to the Casino during Horse Show for a look at the brilliant birds of passage; they form a whispering border to the strip of side-walk from the entrance door to the street. "Rubber plants" Reggie had once called them; and from that day to this the appellation has persisted.

Everybody complained of them and thought them a great bother; but Sybil could not but confess to herself that

they delighted her. To-day in particular she enjoyed the excited murmur they emitted on sight of her. In her huge black hat and diaphanous gown of creamy chiffon, with its deep borders of lace, she stood and chatted with her husband and breathed out fragrance like a thirsty flower at the first drop of rain. No homage struck Sybil as more intoxicating than this. While she looked about in apparent unconsciousness for a sight of the motor, she took in every nudge, every gasp of awe in the crowd. It was the "bravas" of the topmost gallery again.

Mrs. Gordon Chesterton and her daughter shared the clear patch of walk with the Mallorys. Sybil smiled at them and brightly called out something. The two women responded in their stupid way and prepared to climb into their ponderous automobile. Sybil could not have asked for a better foil; she guessed what the comments of the spectators must be.

At this moment Reggie rushed down the club stairs and dashed up to the Mallorys.

"Nora insists she is ill," he cried. "She says she won't be able to leave her bed for a week."

Sybil clicked her heel emphatically against the brick pavement; the gesture was too delicate to be described as a stamp of the foot.

"How silly!" she protested. "Couldn't Nora think up something cleverer than that? What does she say is the matter with her?"

"Ptomaine poisoning, of course," said Reggie. "She's threatened with appendicitis."

"Nora won't ever have her appendix removed." Sybil spoke distinctly, with a view to letting the rubber plants in on the conversation. "Other people's cooks can lay her out so easily now. Some day she will die after a party of mine, just to be nasty."

"But what are we going to do?" pleaded Reggie. "We can't give the show minus Lady Windermere, can we?"

"Somebody will have to read the part," Sybil said.

She reflected for a moment.

"Reggie," she remanded at last, "go and find Muriel. She will do it."

"But Muriel's too strapping," Reggie demurred.

"Reginald!" cooed a voice from the Chesterton limousine. "Mamma wants to talk to you."

Sybil and Reggie exchanged a merry glance. Mrs. Chesterton's designs on Fleet were well known; she wanted him, not for her portly self, but for the dowdy daughter who was beckoning through the window of the motor.

"Whatever you do," warned Sybil, "don't be led into offering the part to Gwendy Chesterton."

Fleet strolled away in the direction of the designing mamma.

Mallory was despatched in pursuit of Muriel. He rounded her up in the ring and almost snatched her off the back of the hunter she was jumping. Sybil, in her ballroom, put the panting girl through a stiff rehearsal and pronounced her adequate if not distinguished.

That night Sybil drooped on her husband's shoulder as they rode to Freebody Park from the gorgeous dinner Mrs. Chesterton had given before the performance.

"I am so tired!" she confessed.

Suddenly, stifling a yawn, she sat up quite straight. "Fred, look quickly—in that motor that just passed. Oh, dear!—you never look in the right direction. I could swear I saw Tim."

"Lady Windermere's Fan" was voted perfect. Despite the malicious prophecy of *Chatter*, the profits were very large; many orphans would go about clothed during the hard winter to come. Muriel got through her ordeal beautifully, with no clumsy fluttering of the pages from which she was compelled to read. People asserted they soon lost sight of the dog-eared pamphlet she carried. Reggie, in the rôle of Lord Windermere, acted as if born for but the one purpose—to go through life the girl's devoted mate. The Mrs. Erlynne of

the occasion was triumphant. Nora's presence being dispensed with, Sybil set Mallory to capering in gentle glee by staying right in the frame; not a single line of hers was given undue stress. It was a brilliant performance; nobody even attempted to deny it.

Sybil seemed to forget she had an existence apart from Mrs. Erlynne; as a matter of fact, however, she kept an eye on the Windermeres. Reggie in particular was ardent; surely, thought the romantic Mrs. Mallory, he was using the utterances of Wilde's nobleman as a medium for the display of his own passion. He had not treated Nora thus; it did not occur to Sybil that the inspiration of an audience, combined with the influence of Mrs. Chesterton's champagne, might be sufficient to evoke fervour. No, Reggie was in love.

Later, at her own house, Sybil drew him to a sequestered corner.

"Reggie," she begged, "will you do me a favour? It would make me so happy."

"Anything, anything, you ask, Sybil," he returned "except marry some girl you've picked out for me."

She sighed. "But if it is a girl you may have picked out too?"

He shook his head. "I have picked out nobody."

Sybil leaned closer.

"Reggie, ask Muriel to marry you."

She hesitated, then determined to hazard everything.

"Muriel loves you—she has confessed it. Not in words—oh, no!—but I have watched her and I can tell."

She had not meant to go so far; she was a bit frightened.

"Oh, nonsense!" Reginald stared down fixedly at the floor. "Muriel doesn't care a rap for me. Besides, the Wintons are desperately hard up."

"Ah, how can you?" Sybil cried.

"If I ever marry, it's got to be a girl like Gwendy Chesterton. Years ago I might have been able to take a chance on marrying for love. But not now. Don't be a goose, Sybil; you know that as well as I do."

He shifted his glance and perused one of Sybil's slippers. "And I *never*, for the life of me, could have fallen for Muriel."

Sybil's eyes, by this time, were starry with tears. She had done a dreadful thing; Muriel's secret had been betrayed.

All at once, Fleet looked up and fixed her with a glance of weary yearning. There was no longer that fiery defiance she had come to expect from him. His brilliant eyes held in them a shadow of melancholy, a tenderness that was almost like renunciation.

"Sybil," he told her, "you are a baby. I have never known a woman like you—never. You are artless and innocent. *Can't* you realize how much I love you?"

He paused.

Then,

"No, of course you can't," he said.

Sybil still looked deep into his eyes, her own wide and sparkling.

"And you don't even realize that *you* are in love, too." He gave her a slow smile. "I give you up, Sybil, because I can't take advantage of a baby. Well, here goes for a piece of news—and I may be a damned fool to tell you—Sybil, you are head over heels in love with one Frederick Mallory. I haven't a show against him; I haven't had a show from the first. Yes, you're in love—but stodgy, respectably; it's almost middle-class."

Sybil timidly returned his smile. She had forgotten Muriel's existence.

"And you're leaving to-morrow." He roused himself and the old light of defiance stole into his eyes and gleamed through the cloud of melancholy. "Things should have been different. Last year I could have had you so easily; you would have been glad to get me then. But," and he shrugged, "we should have been at each other's throat now, if that had happened. The devilish part of it is, five or six years ago I might have taken that long-lost chance of *marrying*—and for love. Think of it, Sybil—you my wife! An absurd, penniless, passionate pair! It wouldn't have lasted; nothing could make a man

of me. But we should have had months, maybe years, of ecstasy; we should have touched heights."

He drew a long, shivering breath. "My God, what a life that would have been! That's what you were meant for, too."

His lips pursed into a silent whistle. "This respectability of yours *is* humdrum. You'll never know the joy I could have given you; you'll never know the suffering, either, for that matter. But you've missed your calling. Lovely, sensual, a great soprano—not a doubt of it—with a disreputable husband to support and abandon yourself to. Instead, you've got a nice, law-abiding mate; you are rich and virtuous. Look here, Sybil!"

Suddenly his anger flickered out; a note of quiet sarcasm came into his voice. "Well, you've missed a good deal by not falling in love with me and don't you forget it. The reason I've opened my mind to you in this way, you understand, is because I'm more than a little drunk."

Sybil had sat quite still during this recital.

She remained motionless, one hand at her heart, until he spoke again.

"It's fortunate I'm not drunker; I might have told you much more. You *do* make me furious; I hate to see a woman sacrifice all she was born for. You're beyond recall now; you'll die virtuous, simply because I came along too late. Take a look at yourself before you go to bed to-night and see if you think eyes like that were meant for a man like Mallory."

Sybil rose with a frightened flutter of silk and lace.

Fleet got up, too, and faced her.

"You great baby!" he mocked. "Some day, soon, I mean to tell you all about myself and my career. And you'll thank your stars, like the silly woman you've become, that I let you alone, that I didn't bring you out. Meanwhile—since I've nobly given you up—I think I'll go and propose to Gwendy before I get too drunk."

Sybil, left alone, trembled.

A quarter of an hour later, Mallory found her.

"Fred," she pleaded, as if begging him to give up a great deal for her sake, "let's go right to Italy. I'm so tired; I don't want to *see* Paris—noisy, horrid place."

She rested her head on his shoulder and burst into childish, refreshing tears.

CHAPTER XI

THE Mallorys did not make for Italy after all. Sybil had changed her mind even before they left Newport. Her husband agreed, with a sigh, that it would really be absurd to keep away from the exquisite apartment awaiting them in Paris, that it would be ridiculous to put up with the discomforts of Italy when a view of the Parc Monceau could be theirs. Had they not for months been thrilling to the prospect of the vista through their windows of the luscious verdure checkered with the gleam of those lovely Corinthian columns? Of course they had. Sybil must have been half asleep to suggest Italy at such a time.

A fortnight later they were settled in Paris. Mallory had left off sighing and was as blissful as Sybil. The Parc Monceau rippled at their feet charmingly. They vied with each other in extravagant imagery.

"It's like a delicious, cool lake lapping in the distance," offered Sybil tentatively.

"The glimpses of marble might be the pebbles it washes over," suggested Mallory.

But his wife always surpassed him in this sort of bout.

"No, those spots of light are flecks of foam or white-caps dancing," she cried.

They never tired of strolling along the paths of the Parc and chatting with the children clothed in gowns as delicate and expensive as Sybil's own. The tiny lake, bordered with its Corinthian columns and vine-wreathed pergola, was ever a joy. And the statues!

Gounod and Thomas and Chopin held Sybil rapt.

"When I die I want my soul to come right to this spot," she murmured one day at the feet of Gounod. "I want it to inhabit the form of Marguerite and live for ever, silent and gazing. Though she is a bit dowdy," she admitted.

So they spent much of their day in the tremulous light filtered through the green foliage. They might have been alone in a deep sea grot; the people about bothered them not at all. Even the old woman with her offer of impossible "fauteuils," as she called them, soon learned at Mallory's generous hint to take herself off.

Sybil and her husband, at the end of a month, had become unconscionable recluses. They shut their ears to every call of the world; they kept away from the Ritz and their friends. Mallory's astonishment was unbounded; he had vaguely feared another season of gaiety to follow close on the heels of Newport.

This drop into peace was incredible. He knew, of course, and so did his wife, that it would not last. The night of "Lady Windermere's Fan" had frightened her and sent her scurrying off from the brilliant scene she loved; she had not yet the courage to steal back.

For the time being, they shared their solitude with but one companion—Paris herself; they became intimate with her for the first time. People are afraid now to go rooting about in the celebrated city and nosing out all its beauties like truffles; it would be such a disgrace to incur the tourists' stigma.

Despite the years these two had spent in Paris, they had never before let themselves go; now at last they wandered unabashed away from the centre of fashion and explored with frank delight. They even at times found themselves pushing and jostling good-naturedly the bands they had learned from childhood to shun—the benighted who suffer the indignities of personally conducted tours.

"I even forget to read the newspapers," Mallory confessed one day. "Reggie's engagement is the only thing we've heard about since we came over."

"Père Lachaise is nicer than the Society column," replied Sybil. "Think of it, Fred! I've given up reading the Society column.

"It's peculiar we haven't heard from Reggie," she announced, as the thought struck her. "I expected he wouldn't give us a moment's peace. Muriel is the only faithful one; and she writes such stupid letters, poor dear."

The next morning Sybil, running over her mail and guessing in characteristic fashion, before she resorted to the paper-knife, what the envelopes contained, announced half aloud:

"*This* one must be from Reggie!"

She let her gaze wander a bit before she settled down to the business of reading.

She slipped the letter out and turned at once to the signature. Yes, it was Reggie's.

Then she noticed a piece of paper that, shaken from the closely written pages, had fluttered to the counterpane. A clipping from *Chatter;* jolly!

In a moment Sybil had started up with a bewildered cry.

"We announce with delight," *the article read*, "that Amazons are after all only women and the prey of love no less than the maid who milks and does the meanest chores. We had, until recently, scouted at such a belief; surely brawn, we argued, formed as it were a coat of mail around the heart and left the fortress impregnable. But no; such is not the case. We learned our error not long ago at Mrs. Frederick Mallory's last charming dance of the season. We confess to the crime of eavesdropping.

"Quite the prettiest woman at the dance ('The hostess!' you cry at once. To which we reply, 'Perhaps.')—quite the prettiest woman at the dance, we repeat, was confiding in delight to Reggie Fleet a bit of news as the writer passed near the covert where the two sat. What she said was so arresting no man could help pausing with ear instinctively pricked.

"'Reggie,' exulted the lady, 'I must tell you something delicious.'

"Fleet leaned near, letting his eye roam but by no means allowing his attention to wander.

"'Reggie,' continued the lady, rippling out her glee, 'who do you think is hopelessly in love with you? I've had the confession from her own lips.'

"Fleet shook his head and brought his eye to rest on the bosom so near.

"'You will never guess.' The possessor of the aforesaid bosom paused and then in triumph breathed out the name. The waves of sound from her pretty mouth were directed to Fleet's receptive ear; but mirth betrayed the lady into a silver laugh, just at the moment she whispered the tidings. This caused the waves to scatter. An eddy of the dulcet murmur smote the writer, concealed but attentive.

"What was the word he caught? It was the name of the girl celebrated afar as the athlete par excellence of the summer colony. Not beautiful, we confess, but preëminent for muscular prowess. We dare hint no further; we have already given the secret away, we fear.

"It struck the writer as distinctly cruel of Fleet to join his companion in a shout of laughter. Should he not rather have felt within him a stir of pity for the lovelorn Amazon?"

Sybil stared, wide-eyed and dazed, at the article.

Then a fit of sobbing took her; she sank back on the pillows and cried out her inarticulate protest.

When she at last roused herself and turned to the letter, her eyes could make out but dimly what Fleet had to say.

"You expect," he wrote, "that I shall begin this with a furious question, 'Who wrote the disgusting, beastly thing?'—or something of the sort. No, I am not going to do that; I am going to be frank for the first and last time in my career. I wrote it. In fact, I have been the life and soul of 'Chatter' for three years. Think of it, Sybil! Do you remember the lovely fan you lost? I picked it up from the rocks; it was delivered by me to the footman; I contributed the famous remarks on the subject to Chatter.

"When you get this, you will doubtless have read about me and pitied me, you and Fred. You will have been treated to a brief paragraph in regard to me, perhaps even with a photograph attached. I wonder. It is hard to tell what the newspapers will do for one.

"After you left Newport, I deliberately kept myself drunk for a week—celebrating my engagement to Gwendy, everybody said. That wasn't, however, the reason. It was all because of you, Sybil. I contemplated suicide—yes, actually—but decided that would be tommyrot. Instead I dashed off the enclosed piece of harmless fun and presented it for publication to my 'Chatter' colleagues. Why? Well, I told myself I was a fool to let the thought of you bother me. I wrote that article in the effort to prove how little you counted. You were like the rest, I insisted, charming to be sure, but at the same time useful; you unwittingly helped me to carry on 'Chatter' and apart from that weren't worth worrying about.

"I was wrong, Sybil. I tell you I have had one hell of a time in the last few weeks. It has got to the point where no world is big enough to hold Reggie Fleet and his conscience from coming together for a last tussle. At least, it had got to that point a few hours ago. It is all settled at present. You are responsible for the issue. I said 'conscience' just now. I don't believe it was really that; but it was some nonsensical thing inside me that prodded.

"I suppose you have heard the news of Nora's approaching marriage. I am going to tell you something, Sybil—not in a boasting spirit! I can honestly say there's no conceit left in me—but just to show how much I care for you. Nora has two things she hopes to gain: first, of course, to get herself out of debt; and secondly, to buy me back. Poor Nora will find to-morrow morning that I am not on hand to be bought. Last year at this time I should have felt myself in prime luck. I should have got right to work to make Gwendy break the engagement; then I should have returned gracefully to Nora's side.

"Now!—Sybil, to-night I feel like taking back what I said to you at your dance. You are following out beautifully what you were born for. And, you great baby, you are even something of an evangelist—or a Madonna à la Boldini. You have set me grovelling in the dust. But no! That can't be it. Come to think of it, you are such a silly, frivolous thing yourself you couldn't possibly reform a man. Again

no! The point is, you have made a baby of me, too. I have been reduced to sentimental mooning; a state so unhealthy is naturally fatal to an able-bodied man.

"I expect I am playing a mean trick on Gwendy to act in this way; but she will get over it soon enough, I'm sure. It would be possible, perhaps, to make amends for the past by marrying Gwendy and going straight from now on. How vulgar that would be!

"I must stop. Down the mail-chute with this and then I shall bid the world and you, Sybil, good-night. Reggie.

"P.S.—As I read this over, it seems to me awful rubbish. I solemnly withdraw all credit from you. I've decided that, after all, the world I am bidding good-night—you are part of that world—is too stupid for me. The explanation of my conduct is, simply, that I am bored to death. Gwendy, Nora, Sybil—I don't care a rap for any of you. No matter what your morals are, you are humdrum and dismally middle-class; there isn't a true aristocrat alive to-day.

"I'm seeing quite clearly at this minute; it's the first time I ever have seen clearly, I find. Middle-class, I tell you; you won't ever get away from it. But how hard you will try, Sybil! And I hope I shall be somewhere watching you and making fun of you. Honestly I do. You are beautiful, Sybil, and amusing, I'll grant you that. Nothing you could achieve now, however, would make me wish to come back and claim you. Isn't it strange? I began this in a vein of thankfulness and adoration. But you don't believe what I've said in this paragraph, so I must needs stop arguing.

R. F."

CHAPTER XII

A MONTH later Sybil looked up from her newspaper.

"*What* do you think, Fred?" she demanded. "Tim has bought the Hollis place for Nora. How can she be so silly as to attempt Newport?"

Mallory looked up, surprised and delighted.

"Well, that lets us out, at any rate," he commented. "We shan't feel now that we ought to open our Newport place. We *can't* be the Tim Sloanes' neighbours."

"Oh, no!" Sybil concurred. "We can do quite enough entertaining here in Paris and in New York. We shan't need Newport; there's always Bar Harbour."

She paused. "But I've got to pay Nora back for the nasty trick she played the night of 'Lady Windermere.' We must do a lot of entertaining this winter; it would be silly to give her a leg up by letting her have things her own way. I would wager anything the Hollis place will be for sale again next year. Then we can go back."

The light of conflict had begun to flicker in her eyes; it was already fanned to a bright flame.

Mallory sighed.

"Sybil, dear, aren't you afraid the habit of entertaining will grow on you? Remember Aunt Alice; she is a slave, you know."

Sybil laughed.

"You *do* tire, don't you, dear? Never mind. There will always be the wonderful three months in Italy."

Mallory nodded gently.

"Well, I'm glad Newport is out of the question for next season. Somehow, I hate to face it just yet—it won't be the same. Poor old Reggie! He's the sort one can't imagine dying."

Reggie! In spite of his last clever, puzzling attempt to assert a power over her, to force himself into an unchallenged place in her thoughts through the weapon of mockery, he had already become dim in her mind, while Mallory still harboured a vivid regret.

"Poor Reggie!" Sybil agreed and returned to her newspaper.

THE SUBTLE THREAD

By Mary Carolyn Davies

I

EVER since the mother had had word that he was killed she had believed that in some way he would break the veil and communicate with her. Surely even death could not hold that eager, boyish, dependent spirit from her. They had been too close to each other for that.

At first this belief had been but a vague thing, subtly comforting her. It made a curtain about her which shut out the sharpness and the worst despair of grief. She did not know that the curtain was there.

But afterward this comfort made itself more perceptible.

She found herself wondering if the dead *did* communicate, if they could make themselves visible to those who had been nearest them. Why not? If it could be so!

She wished that she had talked this this over with him. But he had always been so absurdly active, so vivid.

He had always seemed to her more to *be* life than to possess life. How should she have spoken to him of the possibility of his being one of those who would be stilled? One knew that the possibility was there, but, like thrifty people, they two had used that knowledge to sharpen their sensitiveness, to put an edge to the delight of speaking in answer, and of touching each other.

That had seemed wise then. But now she wondered if, after all, she had not deliberately thrown away a thread that might have now bound them to each other. If he had promised her that if he died he would try to come back, to communicate with her—

When she first found herself thinking these thoughts, she tried to put them from her as a weakness, an absurdity, but soon they seemed to her natural, and presently even necessary.

She began furtively to question other women who had been bereaved; at first very cautiously, and with a sort of scorn as if she herself could put no credence in any seeming evidence.

But soon she forgot to be cautious, and was frankly anxious, pitifully eager and ready to believe.

She found things to believe. It was a time when people must believe the unbelievable, or die. And at such times proofs crowd upon the race.

This old woman and that had seen, after long waiting and hoping, had unbelievably seen—

She fed on these tales. She took hope from hopelessness, and lived from day to day, grew stronger.

But it was not the whispered confidences of other women that made her surest. It was the long hours when she was alone, when she re-created her boy as she had created him twenty years before. Now again his life grew within her. In her brain were memories. Skilfully selecting, putting one on another—slowly, carefully, painfully—out of them she built a man.

All her hours, every day, went to this work of building. What was there for her to do, else? Martha, the serving woman who had also seen him grow from babyhood, did all that there was to do in the little home. The mother sat all day long in her rose garden, under the trellis he had made when he was fifteen, and felt his presence.

Some days the vivid memories came easily, other days she had to evoke them

fiercely, to force them to come. But each day she remembered more and more, in that vivid way that is so little less than real companionship.

After many days, she had found all the memories, had hung them together, had fitted them where they belonged. Out of shadows of words dead, of acts past, of gestures finished, of traits laid aside, she had created a man again. She had rounded out her thought of him, made it live.

Now she had only to conjure up her re-vivified memory. How happy she was! The days had exhausted her, the days when a clear picture of his first day at school, or of his face as they had seen some beautiful thing together, refused to come. She had whipped each stubborn recollection into place. Once recovered, these did not leave her. She was satisfied.

But her satisfaction did not last. She wanted something more.

All through this period she had kept up her inquiries among the women she knew, and among their friends whom she did not know. Anyone who had had an experience, had seen her dead again, she must talk with and question.

She did not always believe, but sometimes the woman seemed so comforted, her story sounded so true—and it is very hard to doubt what one must believe or die.

Her hours alone with his memory and her talk with those who had dead, and who had to see them, as she had, filled her life. It was not an unhappy life. For she felt nearer her boy even than she had when he was alive.

That is, she felt as if she were about to be nearer. For after a time she felt certain that he would come. It was no longer now a hope, it was simply an event to be waited for. At first she waited vaguely, then she began to be sharply, concretely expectant.

"He may come to-day," she would say to herself as she awakened, and looked out from her pillow into the garden.

From this it was a short step to "He *will* come to-day!"

Soon she said that every morning, and never any less hopefully because it had not fulfilled itself the day before.

She turned corners with a rapt belief, she awoke at night waiting for the darkness to resolve itself into his form, she sat in her chair in the rose-garden looking straight before her with eyes ready to widen in startled wonder. Most of all she waited him in the garden.

II

One afternoon she was sitting there under his trellis, trembling with an expectancy she had not known before. She felt that he would come on a sunny afternoon. He was young, he was youth itself, and now, in this spring weather, in the sunshine of this glorious day, how could his spirit stay away from the earth that it knew so comradely?

She looked straight before her at the thick hedge that was twice as high as she.

And he would come to her. He *must* come to what he loved most. Even death could not keep his eager spirit from that. There was a subtle thread she believed that binds a man to what he loved most on earth and that would draw him back inexorably. And to what but her could that thread lead?

He and she had been nearer than most mothers and sons. The bond had been of his own making. He had told her everything. He had had no secrets from her. He would come; he must come.

She sat in her chair, her heart beating as if it had been told some piece of news that she did not yet know. Her face was pale with hope, her eyes were big. The embroidery she had brought out with her seemed dim and far away. The frame trembled in her hands as she tried to go on pushing the needle in and out with its following thread of colour.

She was waiting now, almost without breathing. There was no wind in the garden, the leaves of the vines were as motionless as she. How could anyone move at this instant, in the world, she wondered. Those people passing

in the road, how could they talk so noisily, the girl cutting roses in the garden next door, how could she move?

She was seized with a sudden anger for the family passing, though she had been friendly with them from her own youth. She hated the young girl singing in the next garden, though she knew her to be pleasant and kind. She did not especially like the girl, and her son seemed to share her indifference. Still she liked her well enough and had since she was a barefooted child. There was no reason to hate her because she was singing.

But irrational though it was, she hated the girl and the people on the road and all in the world who laughed and talked and moved about their work, unknowingly, while she waited breathless for her son. She felt, in some new manner, quite apart from those moments of hope, that something strange was about to happen. Her body was trembling. As she waited, things blurred before her.

Against the hedge grew something, a misty figure, a shape through which she could still see the small dark leaves of the hedge. She knew that form, those shoulders.

At last! At last! Out of death he had come back to her. She had seen him.

She had known that his love for her must bring him back! The tie between them had been such as no mother and son had ever felt before. He would have come to comfort her in her grief, no matter what worlds, what veils, stood between.

She had never really doubted this, and already she had believed in it concretely for so long that now she felt no surprise.

It seemed only the inevitable result of the love between a son and a mother. They two, who had been so close, could not be parted by death.

As she gazed, the embroidery fell from her hands and lay in a vivid tangle against the grass.

Slowly she got to her feet, her eyes upon him.

His head was a little to one side in that teasing way he had used to carry it. How the spring sunshine brightened on his hair! She had often seen it that way as he set off to school in the morning, and later, to business.

His young body, pliant and graceful, was straight now and proud, as it had been the night he left with the others.

All as he had always been—all as she had remembered.

He moved; he was coming toward her.

The moment was here!

He had come—over all that might lie between; he had remembered her need and had come to comfort her, to assure her once more that he was hers. He had to come back to what he loved most. She had known, she had believed, and this was her reward. All her being became one prayer of gratitude.

Nearer and nearer he came, silently, a shadow, made out of her importunity.

He saw her, for his face lighted with recognition.

The mother held out her arms as she had held them out to him so many times.

But after a moment she fell back in her chair, sick with heartbreak. For his gaze was fixed on something beyond her.

Walking past her without seeing, he went to the girl in the garden of the next house.

GENIUS is the capacity for side-stepping infinite pains.

THE REASON

By Mrs. L. G. R. Hitchins

SHE was undeniably pretty and everyone admitted she was as good as she looked.
The right kind of men flocked to her in platoons.
Old ladies asked her to tea.
But the other girls avoided her.
She always wanted to try on their new hats.

THE SHRINE

By Louis Untermeyer

BEAUTIFUL, wise—but you do not compel
Worship beyond a bent and willing knee;
Your loveliness is a familiar bell
Ringing incessantly.

Yours is a dazzling and unblemished shrine;
The niches burn with colour, candles sing.
Yet bread is bread, and water is not wine
For all your murmuring.

Yes, you are like a splendid house of prayer,
A sanctuary where no joy has trod;
But I can never stand in reverence there
Where there are lights and altars—but no god.

A KISS on the cheek has finished its travels; a kiss on the lips has just started.

THE ILLUSION

By L. M. Hussey

I

HER transparent pathos arrested the eye of visitors. When they came into the modelling-room at the League they were sure to observe her among the first, working at the little idealized babies that she shaped out of clay. She aroused more interest than the gaudy girls in smocks and bobbed hair or the sculptors of futurist tendencies who erected figures of writhing muscles with faces of arresting grimaces. She was pathetic; it was easy and pleasant to pity her.

She had been at the League for more than a year; everyone knew her and everyone was kind to her. She came from some obscure little town in a Western State with a letter of introduction from a Chicago sculptor. Pretending no intimacy with him, she explained frankly that she knew him only by correspondence and that, on her sending him two or three small plaster casts of her work, he had advised her to study in New York.

Lorenzani, the teacher in charge of the modelling class, received her as one of his pupils with only a brief hesitation; he was a man of some feeling and it would have been too cruel to have refused her desire. He had nothing to regret afterwards. She worked very quietly making her innumerable little babies, each one an impossible, fat cherub. The egoists of the modelling-room were not even jealous of her; her endeavour was so palpably futile.

Lorenzani occasionally stopped at her side, for a moment only, and told her that the child growing out of wet clay was "pretty" or that it was "cute" or that she was doing "very well." She never failed to smile, and her smile was always somewhat affecting. Her hunched back dwarfed her and she had to turn her face up in a trusting attitude to meet his eyes, to watch his lips when he spoke. Then her gold curls, that upon her did not seem an affectation, fell back from her forehead and her face seemed large and more pale.

Occasionally Lorenzani, in a second of idle speculation, wondered what she wanted, what she hoped, what she dreamed, but the fact that in reality life could bring her so little always replaced the problem of his imagination. He would pass on to a more promising pupil, or to one whose skill had almost gone beyond the pupil stage, and her fingers would take up the damp clay again. She worked longer than anyone else and no one conceived her with any other purpose.

She was never visited in her little room near the League. Each evening she walked there alone, passing through the crowds almost like a phantom in the unobtrusive smallness of her deformity. When she entered the house she never troubled to look on the table near the stairs for mail, inasmuch as she had no correspondents to write to her. She went up the stairs quietly and entered her room almost without a sound. When the door was closed behind her she often sighed.

The room had delighted her when she first came to the city. It had embodied then some of her unexpressed and unguessed hopes. The red wall paper was warm and suggestive; the two large windows at the end had fascinated her for a time with the view of

several tall apartment buildings turned intimately with their backs to her searching eyes.

She used to watch the heads that appeared at the windows, the faces of girls and men, several times the glimpse of a scene enacted duskily in the square of a window, an occasional silhouette at night, and the remote, nearly indistinguishable sounds of conversation coming to her ears across the court of backyards and an alley.

These things had suggested the manifold activities of the city, something of its mystery, and a sense of its promise. They assured her in the early days, they made the deeper hopes of her coming seem possible of fulfilment.

In the little town that she had left no one had ever been unkind to her and the pity of all the familiar people among whom she lived since her earliest recollections had entered like a colour and a flavour into all her moments, reminding her of her difference, calling up the knowledge of her abnormality, unwanted and increasingly hateful.

She had no illusions as to the possibility of her success in sculpture, although she loved the clay and the charming little creatures that she fashioned out of it. But primarily the chance to learn more of the technique of modelling had not brought her to the great city. Her heart admitted another urge, although her lips never articulated it.

As a subtle observer, you might have guessed the substance of her secret had you followed her among the streets, watching with intimate eyes. It would have been more obvious during the first months of her arrival. Then her glances, always accomplished furtively, with timidity, embraced the passing figures of many men, men with girls, men alone, groups of men together. They seemed remote from her; she had never the courage of a smile; but afterward, alone in her room, her pallid cheeks flushed with hope. The sense of the city's vastness was strong in her mind, its complexity, its potentialities; such unbelievable things might happen there!

Yet, after the passing of a year, she knew no one. Each evening she returned to her room alone and the dull hours of the night spent themselves slowly.

Like single drops of water eroding a pillar of marble, the empty-handed days, passing one by another, wore down the hidden shaft of her hope. A certain bitterness, an unspoken resentment, stood in its place. She resented the kindness of the students at the League; she came to hate the daily smiles given her by the handful of men with whom she studied.

These were not the smiles she wanted, these curved lips of ill-concealed pity, nor their glances those of her desire! She even read less and less of the romantic books that had engrossed her, and less and less she dreamed of herself in the rôles of the heroines, ardently wished and warmly sought. She began to work dully; the routine of her days irked her; and each gesture of living became trivial and without purpose.

II

Sometimes she walked out at night, often quite late, wandering without purpose in the streets, because she could no longer bear the silence of her room. Often she found some comfort in mingling with the crowds where they were the most dense, on Broadway in the region of the uptown theatres, the cabarets, the restaurants, for then, witnessing the many chances of so much life, flashes of her confidence returned to her.

Once, on her joining a crowd about two men who had begun to fight, a young fellow accidentally standing at her side spoke to her pleasantly and she remembered his face and his smile for many succeeding days. He made some casual comment on the belligerents and she had been too confused to answer him. A moment later two policemen broke into the gathering crowd, she was pushed back, she lost sight of the young chap who had spoken to her and she never saw him again.

Afterward she accused herself of a tragic and imbecile hesitancy, the lack of a quick response, and she wondered if he, like all the others, had spoken to her through a hateful impulse of pity. She walked to the same place for several successive evenings; but no one said anything more to her.

One night, several months after this, she had gone out quite late; unable to sleep, the melancholy scraping of a violin by some amateur in a near room of the house had tortured her with its melancholy wailing. The night was warm; she wore no hat and her yellow curls were gathered up into a loose bundle at the nape of her neck. Her dress hung down in wide folds from her shoulders, half-concealing her deformity. She walked very slowly, and in the aimless languor of her pace, in the squat smallness of her figure, she seemed remote from the life about her, a curious and unheeding dwarf from another and less rigorous existence.

She walked an hour or more and then turned back to return to her silent room. And rounding the corner at her street she saw a man sitting on the curbstone with his head in his hands.

He looked up; he seemed to have heard her step.

A flickering arc light made his countenance indefinite, but its general aspect was plain enough. She saw the sagging lines under his eyes, the drooping mouth, the disordered hair that stuck up over his head like tufts of thick grass. His hat had rolled off a few feet into street, where it lay on its side forlornly; she knew at once that he was drunk.

He was waving his hand at her loosely. Stopping, she approached him.

"Hello," he mumbled.

She bent over a little, looking down at him.

His clothes were incredibly dirty; he seemed to have accumulated something from the smudge of every street, from the filth of every gutter.

"What do you want?" she asked.

Her words were uttered with their customary gentleness and she felt an interest in the encounter.

His lips moved and he muttered something, but she was unable to differentiate any words. He leaned back precariously, propping himself on his hands pressed palms downward on the pavement.

A momentary beam of clear light, falling over his face from the uneven arc above him, revealed his countenance to her plainly. She observed that his features, despite their alteration of the moment, were finely cut; his face was not brutal; she saw that he was young.

Then he dropped his face unexpectedly, drawing up his hands and propping his head between his fingers whilst he supported his elbows on his sharp knees. She perceived his shoulders shake and she heard him sob; he was unaccountably crying. He cried shamelessly and with loud, gurgling sounds.

She drew closer to him and touched him lightly for an instant on his drooping shoulder.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked.

Again he raised his face and this time it was ludicrous with large tears that spread out over the smudges of dirt into areas of dingy moisture. His condition suddenly amused her—his forlorn look, his childish tears, his alcoholic melancholy. She looked down at him and laughed and her little laugh joined like a charming and alleviating counterpoint with the dolorous theme of his grief.

"I th . . . thought you were sympathetic," he mumbled, choking over the words.

"I am!" she exclaimed.

She laughed again. She was delighted with the adventure. Her loneliness was gone, and now, in the isolation of her position, she felt an agreeable content; she could talk to this fellow if she cared to and as long as it pleased her to do so.

"No y're not!" he accused her.

His eyes met her own unsteadily, but with an expression of deep reproach,

like the look of one profoundly hurt and beaten at a friend guilty of a betrayal.

"Look at me!" he cried pathetically, weakly. "Here I am poor and homeless. Does anyone give me a home? Does anyone care 'bout me? It's a shame! . . ."

He broke off in a sob and continued after he had swallowed his grief in convulsive workings of his larynx.

"It's shameful! They ought to be ashamed of themselves to le' me this way, the way I am. Here in a city like this! 'S a rotten shame! . . ."

In the excess of his dolour and indignation, his voice trailed off into mutterings from which she could not separate understandable words.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Jus' waiting!" he cried. "Waiting to see if there's any heart in this city!"

She smiled at him brightly.

"It's too late," she told him. "The hearts are all asleep now. You'd better go home and look for them to-morrow. Poor fellow, tell me where you live and I'll put you on a car."

He gazed at her face solemnly, searching her countenance as if he sought to read the innermost hidden things of her soul.

"Don't believe you're m'friend," he said gravely.

"Oh, yes, I am."

"Got no home," he said.

"Well, where do you live? Where do you sleep?"

"Nowhere. They don't le' me live anywhere now . . ."

His head dropped down on his chest and he was silent. His alcoholic dejection, his conviction of utter friendliness, both amused and touched her.

She watched him a moment without speaking. A man passed the corner and looked at the two; he hesitated a moment and then went on and the sound of his footfalls diminished in the distance. They were alone again.

Presently a startling idea came to her. Her eyes widened a little and her heart beat a little faster; she could feel the hastening blood pressing at the veins in her wrists.

For an instant it seemed bizarre and impossible, but she shrugged her shoulders and realized her position. No one bothered about her; she had no one to consider. So she came to a decision.

She leaned over the drooping figure, grasping his arm in her frail hands.

"Get up!" she commanded.

He made an effort to rise.

"I know," he sobbed accusingly. "You're like all th' rest. . . ."

She pulled impatiently at his arm.

"Come on," she demanded. "Get up now!"

He struggled violently and gained his feet.

For several seconds he tottered uncertainly and she was fearful that he would fall and drag her to the pavement with him. But his sense of equilibrium grew a little more acute, and swaying slightly like a curious blunted tree in an unfelt wind, he stood beside her on the pavement. She continued to pull at his arm.

"Walk along with me," she told him.

He was obedient, and as she stepped forward, he kept an uneven pace with her. There was no lightening of his dejection. He walked with a sunken head, with sagging shoulders, with bent knees. He looked like a derelict of the accumulated punishment of the fates. His soiled clothes flapped about him grotesquely. He muttered to himself.

"No, you're not m'friend," he accused dolefully. "You were never m'friend."

She paid no attention to his words. She pulled him along as fast as she could, as rapidly as her meagre strength allowed. She was glad that it was so late and the street so quiet, for after all it would have been embarrassing to have been observed.

She passed the tall apartment house that was the sentinel of her block, and came to the row of boarding-houses, every room rented to a different person. The brown-stone fronts were dusky in the night. The entrances to the cellars were black and pit-like be-

hind the iron railings that guarded each short flight of descending steps.

She stopped in front of the third house and laboriously turned the drunken man around until he faced the wide steps that went up to the door.

"In here now," she said sharply. "Look out for the steps!"

She pushed him over against the stone banister and they began the flight together. He dragged one foot after the other painfully and several times he frightened her by his swaying uncertainty. She was breathing fast; her eyes were wide and excited; her pale cheeks were brightened by a suffused colour, invisible in the gloom of the night.

She piloted him safely to the landing and searched in her bag for the key. Finding it, she thrust it softly into the lock and opened the door with care. There was no one in the hall. The drunken man followed her with a comforting obedience.

With several perilous moments to make the outcome uncertain, they managed the ascent to the second floor. Once he nearly fell and she clutched hard at the hand-rail and held there with all her scarcely adequate strength. When they reached the last step she breathed deeply, expelling the uneasy air with an immense relief.

They were at the door of her room and she opened it hurriedly. No one had seen her come in; no one had appeared in the hall. She was very much satisfied with her success. She gave her charge a push and he stumbled into the room.

At once she closed the door and locked it. Running over to the gas-jet on the wall, she struck a match and illuminated the room. Desperately holding to a chair, wavering like a tottering animal, was the man she had brought in with her. His eyes blinked in the sudden light.

He looked very amusing and she laughed softly, meanwhile crossing the room to him and taking his arm again.

She led him to a couch against the wall.

"Lie down there," she said, "and go to sleep."

He dropped heavily; the springs creaked under his weight. His arms fell out limply and his hands hung over the edge of the couch in a flexed inanition. He closed his eyes and began to mutter.

"Not m'friend," he mumbled. "Not m'friend. No, she's not m'friend."

He repeated it again, like the refrain of a profound and pitiful sorrow, like the simple expression of some momentous grief. She smiled at him in delight. His words died away into a sorrowful silence, and she continued to smile.

She was happy; she was glad. She had done an adventurous thing and no one could say what might come out of it. She was immensely eager to know what the man would say when he woke and was sober. How surprised he would be! How astonished at finding himself with her! This was the romantic life she had foreseen in the city and the city had brought her something at last!

She threw a quilt over an old red Morris chair and straightened the folds until there was a smooth place for her to recline. She wrapped herself in a thick red dressing gown that extended to the bottoms of her shoes and trailed a little on the floor. Then she turned the light low and sat down.

Leaning back, with half-closed eyes, she looked at the man on the couch. His face was more composed now and the configuration of his features pleased her. He was good looking and he was young!

She felt no loneliness at all.

For a time she wondered what they would say to her in the house if they knew she had brought a man into her room after midnight. She almost wished that she had been seen; she would have felt pride in the discovery. Perhaps they would not then regard her with that hateful and unfailing glance of pity. In this city she could be like others and achieve the life of others. She thought of the girls at the League;

they would envy her fearlessness. Her small body thrilled with pleasure.

She was very tired, but the languor of her weariness was soothing to her.

Presently she closed her own eyes and fell asleep.

III

She awoke early in the morning and when her eyes opened the strangeness of her position startled her.

For some minutes she was unable to understand why she occupied this uncomfortable chair; her back hurt, her body felt sore. She drew her small hands downward over her face as if to brush a web of sleep from her countenance; she blinked her eyes and looked about the room. Then she saw the man on the couch.

He was still asleep. He rested with his head thrown back on the pillow, his mouth slightly open, his arms flung out and one hand hanging limply over the edge of the mattress.

She remembered everything now—and she was afraid!

She stood up quickly, her eyes wide and startled. None of the daring impulses of the night before were with her now; in the light of the morning the desire of hazards was gone and her rapidly beating heart expressed nothing save a vague terror. It seemed to her that she had been exposed to a grave danger, real enough even if the precise terms of it were not understood.

For several seconds she was distracted; she did not know what to do. She felt as if she had put herself in a genuinely menacing position, from which there was no safe extrication. Smoothing back her curls with nervous hands, she stared at the stranger on the couch.

Then she grew calmer. He did not awake; his sleep was profound.

She advanced toward the couch on the tips of her toes, holding her breath. She drew close and looked down at his face.

The scrutiny of his features reassured her. His face was paler now and the swollen pouches under his eyes had somewhat subsided. There was nothing fearful in his aspect; he was only a young man and there was not even a marked brutality in his countenance. A measure of her former emotions returned in looking at him; she began to feel glad of her adventure, proud of her fearlessness and full of agreeable anticipations for whatever might follow. She stood near his couch, smiling.

A noise came to her ears from the next room. The old man who rented it was getting out of bed. At once she perceived a certain peril for herself. She understood the necessity of awakening the stranger and getting him out of the house unseen. For a moment she hesitated, afraid to touch him, but then her resolution came to her and she put her hands on his shoulders. She shook him gently.

It took considerable shaking to make him open his eyes. His lids separated only a little at first; he stared up at her dumbly. He seemed to find nothing strange in her presence there, in his own position. He tried to close his eyes again; she shook him once more. At this he raised himself slowly, propping his head in one hand, his elbow on the couch.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I feel like the devil!"

Now, as if his eyes had not recorded her before, he appeared to see her for the first time. His languorous attitude was abruptly changed for a sitting posture, and he stared at her from head to foot as if she were a sudden phantom.

"Who are you?" he asked. "How did I get here?"

She touched her warning fingers to her lips and restrained, meanwhile, a wish to laugh at his surprise.

"Don't speak so loud," she whispered. "I had no business to bring you here! But, oh, but you were drunk!"

He said nothing; her admonition and his own astonishment kept a temporary seal on his lips. He only waited for her to speak and with her words bring him some enlightenment. His rumpled

hair stood up all over his head in a ludicrous disorder and with his streaked face and wide eyes he looked like a gnome just emerged to a surprising and unexpected light. Now she could not help laughing, and the gentle sound of her mirth vibrated quietly in the room.

"Oh, excuse me," she begged, "but wait till you look at yourself in the glass; you look so funny! And you don't remember me bringing you in here at all!"

"No. . . ."

"Well, I found you just down at the corner and spoke to you, and you said you had no place to go, not a place in the world where you could sleep. What do I care what anybody says?—nobody knew anybody. . . . So I just brought you in here. . . ."

"You spoke to me on the street?"

"Yes, of course; just the way I said."

"What for?"

"Well, you were so awfully drunk. . . . I couldn't leave you there. . . . I brought you here."

He turned slowly on the couch and swung his feet over the edge, placing them softly on the floor.

He looked down at his disreputable clothes; he tried to brush some of the dirt from his coat.

"I must have rolled in every gutter in this town," he remarked.

Then he looked up at her again, studying her like an unreal phenomenon, narrowing his lids until he almost squinted.

He noticed her gentle face, her little deformed body, the gold curls that hung down to her shoulders, and the room that made the setting for her, full of finished and half-finished figures in clay. The little girl and her room increased his puzzle. The shock of uneasiness, the brief sense of fear that had come to him at first passed, but no enlightenment took its place. He sought blindly for her motive in sheltering him.

She was thoroughly delighted and a sense of living life intensely seemed to increase the natural warmth of her blood. She leaned a little toward him, speaking in a voice that was only a whisper.

"Listen," she said. "You know I had no right to bring you here. So I must get you out now before the house is full of people. You can wash at the stand over there and I'll give you a brush for your clothes. Then I'll peep out over the stairs and as soon as we see that it's clear you'll run down and go out quickly. You must wait for me at the corner, and I'll come soon, so that we can have a little breakfast together. I want to talk to you!"

He stood up now, putting aside the problem of her strangeness until he could talk to her later. He understood her anxiety and he hurried to leave the room. Soap and water altered his appearance greatly; he looked still younger and she was sure that she liked his face. He brushed his clothes as well as he could, but the final effect was not wholly admirable.

Meanwhile she stood smiling at him, her hand on the knob of the door, waiting for his readiness. He walked toward her at last and she opened the door softly.

She tip-toed out into the hall and leaned over the banister, looking down No one was in the lower hall. She motioned rapidly for him to follow her. He obeyed, as quietly as he could, and she pointed down the stairs.

"Hurry," she whispered. "And wait for me!"

She watched him go down, clinging to the railing in order that his feet would make less noise in treading the stairs. He opened the front door and disappeared; he was safely out of the house.

She returned to her room.

Her spirits were exulting and her heart was beating fast. She began to change her frock, in haste that she might quickly rejoin the one who had just left her. As she hurried about the room the thought of her former home came to her, the little town, the people she knew, all of them, seeing her each day, being kind to her, pitying her. . . . Their pity was a mockery; she could

laugh at them! Life was bringing her more than ever it vouchsafed to them. She had the courage for adventures they would never dream. The course of compassion was reversed; she pitied them!

In a few minutes she was ready and then she left the room with a rapid step. Filled with agreeable expectancy, she ran down the stairs and opened the front door. Out on the steps she looked up and down the street and she saw him at the corner waiting for her. She waved her hand and he answered with his own.

It took her only a few seconds to reach his side.

"Come," she said breathlessly. "Let's have our breakfast."

He stood still for a moment; he hesitated and she saw his face redden a little. She understood. Laughing, she pulled him along the pavement with her.

"I know," she said. "Of course you're broke; you haven't a penny, have you? Well, that doesn't matter, because I have some money."

An exuberance never felt before stirred within her like a volatile fluid. Her curls stirred on her back with the buoyancy of her step. Her lips, her eyes, each curve of her pale face expressed a smile. Her manner bewildered the man at her side.

"What are you?" he asked. "Have you adopted me? Are you my guardian angel?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "That's it! I've adopted you! Tell me, do you get drunk every day?"

IV

When they were seated in the restaurant she began to ask him questions, one after another, and he found himself fully occupied answering them. She demanded his whole history; and what there was of it, he told her.

He had spent all his money, all he had, since he had arrived in the city a little more than a year before. Like herself, he had come from a small town and with a certain similarity in his aim, although not impelled by as definite an urge. He had wanted things to happen to him, he had desired excitement, but he went about the satisfaction of his wishes with none of her hesitancy, with none of her waiting. A fair-sized sum, coming into his hands on the death of his father—the gradual accumulation of a lifetime's hard work—disappeared from his pockets in something over twelve months. . . . The day before he had been put out of his last boarding-house.

"I pawned a few things that were left," he said, "and of course I celebrated."

She smiled.

"Yes, you celebrated. And what are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you really have an idea?"

"None at all. I'll have to work at something. Anything I can get to do."

She knit her brows thoughtfully.

Meanwhile, he regarded her with a strong curiosity.

Why was she interested in him, why did she trouble about him? But perceiving her deformity, it was easy for his mind to regard her as something different, a woman not quite like others; the fact that she was different in a measure explained her. So he began to accept her and little by little his wonder lessened.

"I'll tell you," she said finally, "you can easily find something to do if you have a little time to look about and somewhere to live while you're doing that. What you need right away is some money. Suppose . . . suppose you let me lend you some?"

He was silent for a moment. He dropped his eyes and stared at his plate.

A faint sense of shame reddened his cheeks a little. The simplicity of the small creature in front of him was pathetic, as pathetic as her unfortunate body. She was not like anyone else. He felt a warm compassion for her.

He raised his eyes slowly.

"Well . . . if you want to do that—" he began.

She was smiling again.

"Surely! Didn't I tell you that I adopted you!"

Already she was beginning to feel very sure of herself. He was so helpless without her; she was the strong one. This would save him from thinking of her as others did, from regarding her with that odious compassion she inevitably aroused, unwanted, unasked, and hateful. She was certain that he would never pity her!

Later she took him with her to the bank, where she drew some money for him. Then they went together to look for a room. There was some difficulty about securing this, but she was never tired; she enjoyed each moment of the search. All these hours together were a promise of the companionship to come and it seemed impossible that she would ever be lonely again. She had found the object of her search; at last the city was bringing her the substance of her dreams. Endearing scenes that she had scarcely dared to vision before entered her imagination now like promises all but fulfilled. She watched her companion endlessly, looking up at his face, reading his features. He was an adventurer, too, and he was worthy of her visions.

At last they found a place; she herself did the bargaining with the woman of the house, she was so solicitous of his comfort. Then she told him that she must go to her work and she took his hand in saying good-bye.

"You'll come and see me this evening, of course?" she asked.

"Certainly," he said.

They parted on the street. He watched her until she disappeared around the corner, waving her hand to him. He sighed a little. He had never met anyone like her; she wanted nothing and her kindness was the result of her pitiful difference. A regret and a dull melancholy marked his mood. Life was ironic! Why was no woman perfect; why did it not bring him a woman with her soul, and with a body that he could love?

V

He visited her that evening as he had promised, and they spent several hours together. She eagerly showed him some of her work and was delighted with his praise. He gave this without stint, and she began to think that perhaps even her work was more important than she had imagined. She was thoroughly happy and deeply regretful when it was time for him to go. She went to the door with him and watched until he was out of sight.

Returning to her room she smiled to herself as she thought how pleasant it would be could she find him drunk every night, as on the night before, and so keep him close to her. But she was patient; she was willing to abide the certain fulfilment of her desire.

Now in the League she worked with joy every day, waiting until the evening when she could be with her friend. Those days when he excused himself, for some reason or another, marked for her only dull and wanting hours. She was so glad with him! They went about the city together, they visited the theatres, they ate in the restaurants, they walked on the streets arm in arm. Her pride in the possession of him was very great, and the sight of a girl walking past her with a man at her side no longer brought her emotions of melancholy.

Yet after a time she began to feel, vaguely at first, a certain wanting in their relation. They had progressed, in their companionship, to a desirable point of intimacy—but for several weeks the course of their mutual interest seemed to have stood still.

She realized this very suddenly one evening when he had found it impossible to be with her. She thought then how the work he had secured was intruding into their hours; frequently he had to work at home in his room. In a way she regretted that he was so faithful to his opportunity.

Somehow the endearing moments of her dreams had not yet come and inexplicably the movement toward them had

stopped. He was kind to her, he confided in her, he told her the incidents of the new work he was doing, he seemed to withhold nothing. She had even observed a look in his eyes that she knew arose from an inner tenderness—yet he had never touched her with tenderness, she knew none of his caresses, no ardour had come into being. She sat in her room alone, pondering this.

It came to her swiftly, in the inspiration of a second, that perhaps he lacked the courage. She began to smile. Of course! He regarded her as the strong one; he did not pity her as others were used to do. In every way she had taken the initiative with him; she felt an old thrill of delight in her fearlessness. And now she remembered more intimately that look in his eyes. Often she had seen it there, when she glanced up at him suddenly, when she met him unexpectedly, when she first appeared to him in the evening. Assuredly it was tenderness; without doubt she was dear to him.

She stood up suddenly, a resolution stirring her heart, quickening her breath, widening her eyes. She brushed back her yellow curls, as if to see more clearly. That evening he was working at home. That evening he was in his room, the room she herself had found for him, working alone.

A sense of strength was full in her senses; it seemed to expand in her body, increase the meagreness of her person, make her resolute and indomitable.

That evening she would go to him and make him confess his love.

She pinned a hat to her hair, threw a blue cloak about her shoulders and hurried out of the room.

On the street the fresh air was exhilarating and she breathed it in quick, full inspirations. At the corner she took a car; she sat alone fidgeting in her seat, impatient with the eternal stopping at every corner, angry because this bumping box on wheels did not fly like a winged chariot to the door of her desire. But at last she came to his street and she hurried out with a quickened beating of her heart.

There were several squares to walk. She half ran, paying no attention to the men and women whom she passed. Now she was very near his house. She fastened her eyes upon the door, knowing that in another moment she would be there, pass in, and find him alone in the upstairs room.

She was almost at the step when the door opened, and she heard his voice!

She stopped abruptly.

A girl stepped out and directly behind her, holding to her arm, he appeared.

The door closed. The pair walked down the steps.

She drew back into the shadows. Her heart seemed to die in her breast, the rise and fall of her breathing seemed to cease as if for ever. They did not see her in the gloom of the house wall, she was so small, she was so negligible. She heard him murmuring caressing words to the girl at his side and she caught an instant image of his face, bending to the eyes of his companion. She saw the expression then that lay over his features—and in a second of abominable revealment she knew that never had he given this look to her, this palpable quality of tenderness, this obvious expression of admiration, of desire.

She knew now what his softened glances had meant to her; their illusion had vanished, the false glamour of her imagination was gone from the memory of them. He had looked at her with an old familiarity, with a meaning she had known and hated all her life—with pity!

Now the two had turned the corner and were gone from her sight.

For a time she stood quietly, pressing against the wall, as if in that flattening against the hard stones she could shrink out of the clutches of reality. But at last she stepped away from the wall and began to walk slowly, the way she had come. She did not take the car; she walked the entire distance to her room. She walked slowly and her body felt light, as if some substance of it had departed from her. Now and

again her nervous hands clenched at her sides.

She reached her room. Within the closed door she ran toward the couch and sank upon its cushions. Her tears ran out of the corners of her eyes and wet her cheeks. How foolish she had been, what a mirage had deceived her!

At last she raised her face. Something of its old look had returned, the look that marked her countenance before the glad, illusive days when she had found her man upon the street corner. The dumb pain, the dumb patience, came back to her face—the expression of a different one, of a hopeless one, of a pitiful one.

IN THE KEY OF BLUE

By T. F. Mitchell

SHE wished for masculiue admiration but she was plain and got none of it. She realized that she must attract some man's attention. With this end in view she stood on a street corner for two hours waiting for a man to come up and speak to her. She was ready to give up in despair when her heart was suddenly made glad by the sound of heavy masculine footsteps behind her. She waited eagerly for him to speak.

"Move on," he said gruffly as he twirled his club.

GIFTS

By Babette Deutsch

I HAVE woven you music
And flowers too;
What more elflike thing
Would you have me do?

I have taken your heart
And given you pain;
Do you want my gifts
Or your heart again?

A CHANT FOR LOVERS

By Harry Kemp

LOVE is an army terrible with banners,
Love is a terrible, triumphant king,
Swift as the feet of the wind is his coming;
He is no soft and little thing.

If you seek dalliance, gentle, gentle lovers,
Or any substance of soft desire!
Turn, turn aside from his marching banners
And his young eyes of sleeping fire . . .

Love is an army terrible with banners,
But if you will dare his implacable face
He will give you sunrise and moonrise
And twenty million stars in space!

BETWEEN twenty and thirty a woman is most charming. Before that she is trying to conceal her youth: after it, she is trying to simulate it.

WHEN a woman loses prestige among women it follows that she has gained prestige with some man.

WOMEN are of two types: those who are hard to persuade and those who are hard to dissuade.

THE NOBLE MOMENT

By N. G. Caylor

I

SHE was to meet James Glegg at dinner that evening. Quite unconsciously, Helen Dixon had formed the habit of slowing down the pace of life on those days. It was as if, not realizing, she was saving herself.

This afternoon—it was Saturday—she went to pay a leisurely call on Lilly Carew, the daughter of old family friends—just a child, Helen thought—who had married some weeks before.

When she rang the bell she felt well-gowned and well-poised. She was conscious of her height. She was aware of a feeling of lovely matronliness, this despite the fact that she was thirty-six years old and unmarried. She was ready to humour the ridiculously young child on her visit. She would wish her happiness in the conventional way, and be amused. Certainly the apartment that Lilly had written of was amusing.

"Come and visit us in our 'wee two' or 'we two,' spell it as you like," she had written.

Those ridiculous youngsters, starting out in a room and kitchenette—furnished. Helen and James Glegg had made plans for a real home.

In reality, that was the secret of her complacence. She was engaged to be married to James Glegg. At her age that meant, of course, that she had studied life, had weighed and measured it, and was prepared to attack its problems with confidence.

With a collected benignity Helen Dixon walked up the narrow cement of the court, and finding the number and the name above the bell, rang to announce herself.

An hour later, when she left, she felt aimless, ineffective, *gauche;* her very height seemed to her to typify a diffusion of vitality, a lack of concentration. She wondered if her groomed appearance only lent an effect of blandness, stamping a lack that reached within.

Accustomed to think of topics as reflected by herself, just as she rejected ideas which did not present her kind graciously, she was thinking intensely of Lilly Carew.

For the child, unfinished as she was, had touched with sure fingers the liquid fire of life. Just as wispy and sudden as she had been as a little girl, Lilly had become vital, compelling. Hers was the passion of worship, the richness of feeling that made a sensation of each breath of life, a past, present and future of every moment.

"Silly," Helen Dixon said to herself as she walked away, and "fatuous." Her words, the offering of her well-ordered mind, made no impression upon her feeling.

But in reality, beyond the mechanical sensation of movement, she did not feel. The breath of flame she had passed had left her blank.

She wondered what time it was. She had meant to stay longer. But then Donald Carew had arrived. And she had gone quickly. One had to leave them alone. Lilly had been talking to her when she heard the hall door open. A brilliance had leaped into her eyes and her face had turned pale, like a sudden flame reflected in a frosty window. She had rushed into the hall, and Helen Dixon had known that they were in each other's arms.

She had gone soon after that.

She walked now, and the wind reached the cold skin of her body.

The other was a dynamo. The wind would not touch the area of her body and leave her cold. She did not feel the skin all over her cold like that. She was a soul, vibrating from within.

Silly thoughts—those.

Helen Dixon began to talk to herself as she walked. "Poor children. An up-hill struggle. Not like James and I—a real home. Books. Firelight on the dinner service—"

Despite the comfortable words she wanted to bawl. An irritation crept into her nerves. It ached in her arms. It made an unbearable lump in her chest. Something to cry out against. Something not to be borne.

She took a taxi down-town. A curious blankness was on her. There was nothing to think about.

II

In the ladies' dressing-room in the hotel, with care and distaste, she retouched her appearance. Something impatient in her arms made her turn away from the mirror. Then she sat, looking with careful and yet blank eyes on the other women.

There was something loathsomely deliberate in their preening. Yes, that was it—by dragging out the processes of life you made things loathsome. Wasn't that the secret of beauty? A mood, a pose, the gleam of evanescence?

What would she and James Glegg talk about that evening? Sometimes they discussed love—implicitly as understanding people. He often said he had an intellectual admiration for her. She was measured in all things and competent, he said. Measured, competent—

She bit her lips against the tears.

At last she went to meet him. He stood near a pillar, straight and correct, something professionally eager in his roving glance, she thought. Like a teacher searching for receptive eyes in a class-room.

There was solicitude in his eyes as he met her.

"You look—"

"Don't tell me I look haggard!" Her laugh was brittle.

"Tired, Helen?"

Speculatively she analyzed.

"We are two people—desperate for a home," she thought.

He ordered dinner quietly. In his eager, almost youthful way, he would look up from the bill of fare to consult her. And she, who usually enjoyed these consultations, making them the occasion for little dissertations on dining, happy combinations of dishes and moods of taste, could hardly gather herself to answer.

"I feel tragic," she realized. "I want to wring my hands. I'm funny."

But her sense of humour, always meagre, would not come to the rescue.

Conversation was no better.

"Have you read the translation of the Russian all-Soviet constitution?" he asked her.

She hadn't.

"Amusing—" he said. "One always had the idea that they meant equality—the Socialists. And now they just reverse the order. Before the moneyed classes voted. Now the proletariat does—and the capitalist doesn't."

He went on. It seemed to Helen Dixon that he drifted.

Something raged within her.

She wanted to talk about—

She didn't know what.

The waiter placed a small dish of salad at her right.

"Serve it as a course," she snapped.

That was it. Anger. She wanted to be angry. No use in disguising the demons of nervousness that jumped beneath her skin, no use in calming her tones. She wanted to rasp, to be disagreeable. Spluttering. Mean. Destructive.

She wanted to shock James Glegg—who drifted so hopelessly on.

"You are really a small mind, a provincial college instructor. Do you know? A cheap failure. Idiot! Working until almost forty to work up

to a living wage. Thief! You robbed —me."

Something throbbing, angry, leaped into her throat It burned her eyes. It crouched livid-white behind the corners of her mouth.

No use thinking those things. Under lowered brows she surveyed him. His hair was getting white at the temples. What more did he deserve? But then —a real love, a home, children. His kindliness would expand. What was before them? Not the sacred ardour of the children, of Lilly and Carew.

Lilly had trembled when she spoke of "Don."

Her voice would fail and fall into her throat.

"I am having a wonderful time—and he knows it," Lilly had said.

The comic, inadequate in-a-door bed. Lilly had wheeled it out to exhibit it. Her voice had stopped with a click a sharp intake of breath—

III

When the waiter approached them again he was timid, obsequious.

She wanted everyone to drop before her wilting anger.

"A woman cheated"—the phrase flashed into her mind.

"Silly, you're like a movie," she rebuked herself.

Then she began to talk, stridently, with a metallic sound.

Someone had played the "Serenade" by Drdla, spoiled it. The tones were mawkish-sweet.

So they talked of music. She wanted to crush his every reach of thought.

He was trying to tell of Schumann-Heink singing "My Tears Shall Flow." She jarred in with, "Give me the Habanera from 'Carmen'—my favourite—" She went on to further idiocies.

"I always dreamed of singing it with a gaudy shawl draped over me—" Recklessly—"but my figure was not sensuous enough—"

Sensuous. He winced at the word, as she had known he would.

"You don't know me," in a high, tense tone. "Did you know I have always wanted to be a detective?" She had never thought of it before.

So it went on. He was disturbed.

"Do you know?" she thought with enjoyment, "I should like to nag at you—to make you really miserable—"

He was unhappy when he left her at her door. Something in her laughed.

IV

"Yes, treat them that way." She didn't quite know what she meant.

In the same nervous, angry exaltation she mounted to her room in the house. "I'm tired—" she said aloud as she entered.

She lit the light, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror. "Old—a fright —well—"

She took off her hat, put out the light, and drew up the shade. The street was a low, sweet mist of light—the dim round light-globes like tired moons or like the kind of dull lights of a sick-room.

She sat and watched the street, her cheek pressed to the window.

"I am played out," she told herself intellectually. "Grooming—hygiene—to keep appearances—"

And then with a rush of liking for herself—somehow like in former years.

"My dear—you're not nearly so bad when you are alone. People wear on you," she told herself. "You could be quite natural and charming if you only had yourself to please—"

"Poor Jim—" she thought.

Almost aloud, as if composing her thought, she said, "Our lives are going to be drawn after a pattern lived by others. We have no fire of creation in us."

And then, no longer reasoning, she felt in a flash the picture of the two youngsters from whom she had parted. Like shimmering ghosts they filled the night with their fused happiness—their two smiling figures—

A hot tear met the cold of her cheek against the pane—

"Oh, God," she whispered, "let me

be young! Don't let me nag at my husband. I want to be happy. I want to make him happy—"

Almost like a prayer she amended, with a half-humorous glow, through her tears, "I have to have a wonderful time— and I want him to know it—"

And then, strangely enough, she prayed. Scraps of Biblical phrase filled her words. She prayed into the blue-and-whiteness of the misty night—into the unfathomable peace about her. . .

It left her very tired, and aware of her tiredness.

"I have worked hard," she thought. "Played out—" she used the phrase again. "And I will make him miserable. I wanted to nag, hurt, abuse him, to-night— And I love him."

The solution was easy. The decision overwhelming. "I am not going to marry him. I have no right to. Someone young can still bring him illusions—"

The misty night swam in her tears—

"This is your message, dear God—
"Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven—"

It was a long time before she went to bed.

* * * * *

When she woke up in the morning she knew that she would marry him and that she would make him suffer for all the mothering she had missed, all the satisfaction she had missed and all the ease that she would miss until she had safely married him.

CHATTER

By E. Gifford Noyes

THE world is very sweet, even if you won't marry me. The dove brown meadows under a shell grey sky, the little hills, violet and mauve, as soft as a pigeon's wing. I cannot be unhappy. The sails are so pretty on the sea. The sand is so warm in my hands. It was madness to have dreamed of marrying you. I shall go on, when the loveliness passes, drift like those junks, blown by the wind, drop into some harbour, lodge at some inn, see the flutter of a white curtain, glimpse a face at a window pane. Child, are you attending?

Frail hands, dear eyes, exquisite beauty! I've told you that before? Didn't Dante say things over and over again of Beatrice and Petrarch of Laura?

Well, smell the richness of the earth in the wind. The world is very sweet without you. So I shall go down that twisting road, past the open barn, where the calves are fed and your maltese kittens snuggle in the hay. Off and away! Into the crannies of the world, into the cobbled streets with sudden corners, laughing, weeping, scribbling and sometimes believing, I loved you.

SANG FROID: The attempt to conceal from your friends the fact that you know that they know that your marriage is a failure.

THE SON OF A HUNDRED GRANDFATHERS

By Olga Petrova

I

CHING LI put his iron down on its stand. Mechanically he wiped the dew from his forehead and mechanically he turned off the switch. With the same mechanical precision he folded the wisp of violet-tinted chiffon embroidered with the tiny heart just above the spot where its owner's heart had been wont to pulse—thereby sending the sheer fabric into nameless and delicious flutterings—and placed it on top of a nearby pile of shimmering gossamer. This done he took an American pipe from the depths of his voluminous sleeve and betook himself to the stoop, there to wait for the coming of the police.

II

IT was a sweltering night. The sun which had been beating down mercilessly all day upon New York in general and upon Ching Li's Very Good Hand Laundry in particular had retired some hours ago, but the baked pavements still threw off a humidity with a fury that presaged an even hotter tomorrow. One might almost hear the heat in the air, or what did duty for air, above the sounds indissolubly associated with early night in the tenement district.

A couple of dogs near by contested the ownership of a bone with full canine ferocity. A female cat wailed her passion to high heaven and to a male of her own species even more mangy and lovelorn than herself.

Across this din came the sounds of a connubial dispute carried on with a vigour oblivious of a heat only a degree less than its own, the arguments being liberally punctuated with references to the ancestry of the gentleman in the case, or rather, to an apparent lack of any human ancestry at all. Now and then, between the cats, the dogs and the humans, came the squawk of a parrot enraged at his legitimate slumbers being thus rudely disturbed. From his cage on a neighbouring fire-escape came a volley of oaths. Now and then a laugh, shrill and raucous, proved that mirth is comparative like anything else, while on an adjoining porch a pair of lovers crooned and whispered in the shadows.

Ching Li fished again in his sleeve and was rewarded this time by a box of matches, with one of which he lighted his pipe. An American pipe could not compare with the pipe of his grandfathers to be sure, but one must be contented with subterfuge when the devil holds the opium, and when one has a capacity for dreaming one may conjure up all sorts of myths even without its poppied presence.

In retrospect Ching Li's dreams began to take shape.

Staring straight ahead of him, oblivious of the potential lovers in close proximity and of the erstwhile lovers a little farther off who had tasted of the cup and had evidently found that tasting bitter, he saw again the familiar roof of the parental home.

In fancy he re-lived the scene in which he had informed his august father of

his determination to abjure the land of his birth, of almonds and of honey, and to set sail for the land of the foreign devils, there to learn the secret of American success, American language and customs.

He shivered a little as he recalled the curse of his resplendent father, the tears of his celestial mother, not to mention the haughty indignation of his honourable mother-in-law of only two days' mother-in-lawness. He recalled the fact that like the prodigal of the Christian Bible—Ching Li was exceedingly well read—the said august parent had delivered to him the portion of goods that fell to him and had adjured him on the tablets of his ancestors never to return.

He recalled his arrival at Shanghai. He remembered his leaving there. He lived again the terrible indisposition which had been his during the first four days of the trip to San Francisco. He remembered, too, that his impression of that city was as of a kaleidoscope, so violently shaken as to take no definite form in his consciousness.

He did recall, however, that other adventurous spirits from his own land had arrived there ahead of him and that one section of town was practically inhabited by Chinese, some still Chinese in outward as well as inward form, while others spoke the language of the country and in American clothes plied their trades with all the Oriental cunning of their flowery native land.

In New York, concentration point of the country's greatness, melting pot in which the ingredients, white, yellow and black, never will and never can become one, Ching Li had counted up what was left of his earthly belongings.

They were as follows: three Chinese kimonas with their attendant articles of clothing, a complete set of the Encyclopedia Britannica, a very large dictionary in English and Chinese, a trunk bought in San Francisco, and a hundred and sixty-five taels, which in the parlance of this foreign land amounted to about one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Now one hundred and sixty-five taels and one hundred and twenty-five dollars may be intrinsically the same as far as coin of either realm is concerned, but the purchasing power of the one shrivels and shrinks like unto the skin of a snake cast in the springtime when translated into the terms of the other. So you will observe that as far as a seeker after truth and a worthy scion of a worthy ancestry was concerned, Ching Li was not to be regarded in any sense as a bloated capitalist.

With a hundred and twenty-five dollars left (he now thought in dollars), he decided that his future studies of America were not to be gained within the gilded portals of Harvard or Yale, but rather in some occupation which might be both profitable and pleasant. With one hundred and twenty-five dollars one could not set up in a very large way as, say, a dealer in curios. Besides, he rather disliked the idea of curios in connection with anything Chinese. There were not a great many metiers open to one of his race, so that the process of selection was not unduly delayed.

The great idea had come to him one evening when counting for the five hundredth time the remains of his one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Why not a laundry! A Chinese laundry! What more chaste or more excellent way to employ himself profitably and at the same time pursue his observation of the American? One hundred and twenty-five dollars, even American dollars, would be sufficient for rent and equipment in a modest district for many moons to come.

True, it was an unusual proceeding, this, the scion of a hundred grandfathers washing the dirty linen of individuals who, as like as not, might find —if they searched assiduously enough —a single grandfather among the contents of their waste-paper baskets.

But what of it? To the pure all things are pure, and in a democracy like America a little thing like a grandfather more or less is a matter of no importance from their point of view, so why from his?

Then again, he didn't know very much about laundering as a profession, but with his one hundred and twenty-five dollars he would be able to hire a first-class hand to do the actual labour at first, and at the same time he would be learning the intricacies of the trade from a very maestro of the art.

No sooner planned than executed.

Wing Foo, a very capable laundryman, but without the advantages of personal capital, listened to the blandishments and the promises of future partnership in the business, as propounded by Ching Li. "Ching Li's Very Good Hand Laundry" was therefore born amid a festival of joss sticks, on the ground floor of 101 Percy Street in the Borough of Manhattan.

III

BEING a philosopher and having put his hand to the iron as it were, the offspring of a hundred grandfathers looked not back. Stifled were the memories of the plum-trees of his native China—stifled also the memories of their sweet odours in the springtime. As through a haze he remembered the wrath of his august parent, the tears of his celestial maternal parent and the big-eyed wonder of his little twelve-year-old bride. All his energy, both of mind and body, were devoted to becoming successful, first as a laundry man and afterwards, through that medium, as a student of things American.

With true Oriental stoicism he investigated the very mysteries of washing and ironing.

Under Wing Foo's experienced care he mastered the elementary details of sheets and flat wash.

He passed through the intermediate stages of collars and cuffs and had, after due diligence, arrived at that graduation attendant upon the extremest skill of his art, namely, chiffons and crêpe de chine.

As time went on the laundering of such delicate fabrics supplied the only glamour of Ching Li's Percy Street existence. They spoke to him mutely of the poesy of remote Fifth Avenue in contra-distinction to the utter lack of it on Avenue A.

Particularly entranced was he with the lingerie of a certain lady whose tastes ran in the direction of violet chiffon with the finest of fine laces and embroideries in discreet abeyance. All her gossamer garments were embroidered with a tiny embroidered heart, above the knees of certain of them and above the rounded fulnesses of others. In addition to the heart there was also another attraction, equally great if not greater, to the celestial senses of Ching Li—perfume. Soul-stirring or sensuous, mystical or flamboyant, just as his mood might happen to be as he passed the iron caressingly over their damp surfaces, sending the perfumed steam in little warm waves against his nostrils.

Then would Ching Li dream dreams and weave fantasies like nothing conceived of even by the pipes of happy China.

Sometimes he would see himself with all the mysteries of all the ages mastered and familiar, and by his side would be the shadow of a woman, white as snow, with soft blue eyes and curling yellow hair. An American woman—who smelled of cherry blossoms and yet of joss sticks and who called him "Honey." He had heard the word used many times by American sweethearts and he liked the sound of it. . . . He could hear the crooning of bees in the grass, he could smell the sweet odour of the fields and the honey-comb.

Yes, she must certainly call him "honey," for would he not surely show her how sweet a soul may be wrapped in the yellow carcass of outwardly, a laundryman, but inwardly, a savant, a poet, a lover?

Ching Li's close attention to the necessities of his laundry had given him little time to pursue his contemplated study of the country he had adopted for his own. From early morning to late twilight he and Wing Foo would stand over the tub or ironing board and when at last night fell, rather than go

out and risk the spending of a few of his hardly gotten cents he would retire to the stoop with his pipe and his dictionary, there to pursue his visions and the flights of his Oriental soul.

But every dream and every vision radiated to or radiated from the wearer of the violet lingerie. She must be very beautiful. No one could wear such gossamer fabrics and be anything but beautiful. The size of her little chiffon vest would presuppose that she was slight. Ching Li would picture her to himself, her bosom rising and falling like a lovely music with every beat of her little heart.

He would picture the gentle curves which the chiffon in his hands would soon conceal and yet reveal. Then the perfume of her would send his heart a-dreaming until he would be forced to put down his iron for the very terror and ecstasy which this unknown woman inspired in him.

As the weeks and the months crawled by the violet woman grew to be an obsession. She figured as prominently now in his actual conscious life as she had previously figured in the visions he had thought to keep visions.

His tortured soul cried out its revolt. He must see her . . . he must . . . but how?

Many times he would carry the fragile bundle to her residence himself in the vain hope that he might catch a stray glimpse of his goddess . . . but no . . . and week after week he would trudge back, his dream and love and passion still unfulfilled. Then . . . one day . . . the great occasion came.

Could it have been only *to-day?* It seemed now so very long ago that tragedy, stark, actual tragedy had broken in on Ching Li's violet dreaming and sent it, with a crash, down from the heights of Olympus to the nethermost depths of 101 Percy Street in the Borough of Manhattan.

Ching Li had spent the afternoon as usual, ironing the soft silks and laces which had come to be his sole and particular care. He had left the violet lady's violet garments for the last as a sort of a present, a reward for a child who has toiled through a long and strenuous day. All day long, in spite of the torrid heat, in spite of the overpowering humidity and the stale air of Avenue A, Ching Li's soul had been held up, revitalized, at the thought of the perfumed communion with these *pièces de resistance.*

Six o'clock came. Wing Foo had put down his iron, announced that he "no more work some more in this velly bad dam' heat," and had left Ching Li to his dreams and the visions of this lilac lingerie.

Gently he had patted the soft fabrics and run his iron into little nooks and corners, until he came to the embroidered heart. . . .

The perfume of cherry blossoms and yet of joss sticks had wafted upward. He had bent his head lest one wave of its fragrance might escape him. If he might only hold the beautiful lady herself for one little perfumed second! If he might only whisper half of the adoration of his Chinese heart! If he might only tell her how long and how passionately he had thought of her and adored her, of his utter loneliness. . . .

His brain and his hand had refused to co-ordinate any longer. SSSssss . . . the point of the iron had torn through the little embroidered heart and a great black gash was left to mark the place where it once had been.

Ching Li's dream came to a sudden and horrible end.

Was it an omen? An omen of something terrible about to happen to her? The gods of China forbid!

He knelt reverently down by the ironing board, reverently he took the gossamer vest in his two hands and reverently pressed it to his lips while the tears from the almond eyes of this son of a hundred grandfathers fell upon its smooth surface.

What should he do? How come into the presence of his lilac lady? Living or dead he felt that he must see her at once.

With an unusual swiftness of his processes of thought he reviewed the

situation. Ah, he had it! He would take a taxicab immediately, regardless of financial consequences. He would take the vest with him to her residence and beg an immediate interview that he might present his apologies for his superhuman carelessness and stupidity. He would not take her refusal to see him for an answer.

No sooner said than done.

The taxi driver pocketed his fare with an odd grunt, remarking on the nerve of "chinks" in a civilized country and honked away into the turgid shadows.

Ching Li ascended the steps of the front entrance and rang the bell.

IV

THE door was opened by a footman in resplendent livery who looked Ching Li up and down and was about to shut the door in his face when something, perhaps in the inevitableness of that face itself, made him think better of it and in a surly tone ask what was wanted.

Ching Li, in a voice in which none of the miserable apprehension of his soul was made manifest, requested a personal interview with the footman's mistress on a matter of great and immediate importance.

Ching Li's great education and his hundred grandfathers had never stood him in better stead than now. The footman, who was of Swedish persuasion, inwardly reflecting that in war time you could never tell when a man is "a government official, an ambassador or something," ushered him into the hall and offered him a seat. A moment later he returned with the intelligence that Mrs. Finkelstein would see Mr. Ching Li if he would step this way.

Ching Li's heart leapt from his ribs to his throat. Then she wasn't dead! . . . Thank all the gods for their celestial beneficence! And he was to see his lilac lady in all the glory of her lilac lingerie, in the flesh. Of course she would be hidden by outer garments—but what of that? With the eyes of the soul Ching Li knew every fold of her silken covering. And with the eyes of his dreams.

He followed the footman on satin feet, scarce daring to tread, and clutching the precious means of this sudden state of grace to his lovelorn heart.

"Mr. Ching Li, Madame!"

Through a haze of soft golden light he beheld a figure reclining on a couch drawn up to an empty fire-place. The odour of cherry blossoms and yet of joss sticks was in the air. He could not see her face for she lay with her back turned to the room.

For one brief second Ching Li's feet hovered between earth and heaven. Should he present his apologies first or tell of his great love first? Should he speak at all, or should this laden silence not speak for him?

A million thoughts crowded through his brain. Mechanically he noted a Buddha wrought of bronze standing on a nearby table and subconsciously he bowed his head in salutation. Then, still shrouded as with a spiritual mist, Ching Li felt that the footman had retired.

He opened his mouth to speak. His throat was dry, dry as the punk he burned. His tongue refused its office. His English deserted him, for the jade it was. The blood pounded in his ears—but above the din he heard a sharp, nasal, screechy voice saying, petulantly:

"Well, what is it you want? It's too bad that they must come to me for everything."

Down from the cherry trees he came with a bang! There began to dissolve about him the violet mist of his thousand dreams. What a voice! Shadows of his august mother-in-law, *what* a voice!

He drew a little nearer. The lilac lady raised herself on her divan and turned her countenance to the horrified son of a hundred grandfathers.

Across her shrunken shoulders a kimona was so tightly drawn as to show not a vestige of a curve beneath. Her bony arms terminated in hands that

had the semblance of the talons of some horrid bird. Her nose, true to the racial characteristics of her name, overshadowed a chin from which the teeth and gums had long ago receded. Her scrawny neck supported a head topped by a mass of sandy, greyish hair from which any hint of beauty had been carefully eliminated by Time's handmaidens. To complete the picture her cheeks were heavily rouged, as was her thin loveless mouth, drawn and puckered at the corners like some hideous mask.

Ching Li looked, scarce believing the evidence of his two eyes. It could not be true. It must be the diabolical lie of his own eyes, mad with too much dreaming. This ghastly old hag, the lady of his thousand nights' adoration —it couldn't be! Slowly the hideous truth dawned upon his unbelieving senses.

Such a travesty of love must not be allowed to continue. His duty became clear to him. He raised the bronze Buddha with both hands and approached the divan and the rigid Mrs. Finkelstein. Slowly and with perfect precision he brought it down with all its ten-pound weight on the skull of what had in his sleeping and waking hours represented the lilac lady of his dreams. One blow was sufficient. With scarcely a sound she had crumpled, and not a breath was left in the unlovely body of Mrs. Finkelstein.

Ching Li picked up his bundle which had fallen to the floor and with a shudder of disgust left the room.

V

CHING LI put his iron down on its stand. Mechanically he wiped the dew from his forehead and mechanically he turned off the switch. With the same mechanical precision he folded the wisp of violet tinted chiffon, embroidered with a tiny heart just above the spot where its owner's heart had been wont to pulse—thereby sending the sheer fabric into nameless and delicious flutterings—and placed it on top of a nearby pile of shimmering gossamer. This done, he took an American pipe from the depths of his voluminous sleeve and betook himself to the stoop, there to wait for the coming of the police.

WHEN a bachelor marries he astonishes himself a good deal more than he astonishes his friends.

"WE hate each other and yet we do not part," said the woman. "That is love," said the man.

ALL widows and spinsters secretly advocate divorce. It puts husbands into circulation.

FUGITIVES

By Mary Carolyn Davies

I

THE old man and his wife had been married fifty years. To-night was the anniversary. Their children and grandchildren had come many miles from their farms scattered over the countryside. The fathers and mothers talked comfortably, bridging with the help of the reminiscent glow of the good dinner they had eaten, the years since they had seen each other. The grandfather and grandmother moved a little timorously among them, too concerned over whether there were enough towels in nephew John's room and whether Mary's baby was safely sleeping to be proud. After the guests were gone, to-morrow they would remember, complacently and triumphantly. It was a good thing to have something to remember.

But now they were in a panic lest anything should mar the smoothness of the reunion.

In the room beyond, the grandchildren were dancing, the grandchildren and the children of nephews and nieces and relatives by marriage.

The dancers did not care that what they were dancing in honour of was the fact that an old man and an old woman had been married fifty years. They did not realize that the music, the sweet cider on the table in the hall, the red apples and brown nuts in the bowls on the window-seat, they themselves, were pieces placed to do honour to the owners of this house.

They realized only their own youth and the youth in the couples dancing opposite them, and in the partners joined to them by hot, perspiring hands. They saw the shine of each others' eyes, and heard each others' high excited laughter and words, and they were fused by all this into one fluid mass of life. Each one felt himself to be gay, witty, radiant, attractive. The conceit which is characteristic of the crowd had fallen upon the individual and for the moment changed him, disguised him with the common mantle which covered them all alike, the mantle of the crowd thinking, feeling, playing as one.

The fathers and mothers looked on indulgently, complacently. They had had all this such a short time ago that they were still not tired of resting, for they had not yet begun to hunger for it again.

But the grandfather gazed through the folding doors with a puzzled wonderment. He saw something in the tense movements of the young men's shoulders, in the electric touch of eyes, in the sudden catching of hands and flinging of them aside, that he did not quite comprehend.

He had felt that way once, that he vaguely remembered, but what was it all about? To be alive, that was the thing. These silly young things dancing, were alive, their blood was beating. There was the lure of the attraction of the boys for the girls, too. There was the possibility, when one was that age, of suddenly looking across at the girl opposite one in a contra-dance, and wanting to buy a farm and a couple of cows and a team and marry her. That was an exciting possibility, of course.

But love was not all. Love was in that throng of romping young things like an extra person mingling with them, threading in and out with the twistings of the dances. But love was not the

only thing that was so surely among them as to be almost capable of being seen. There was something else. What was it?

"Grandfather's not hearing a word we're saying," said his eldest daughter to her mother.

"Father's a little tired," said the gentle old woman. "It's been an exciting day for him."

"And for you, Mamma," said her youngest son, leaning over with the sacrifice of comfort and the carefulness of a fat man who has dined well to pat her hand.

"I don't feel things the way your father does," she said. "I want he should have a good time to-night. A good time for once in his life. He's earned it."

"You've both earned it, Aunty," said the nearest nephew. "It's a big night for you both. It'll give you something to remember."

"There, isn't that the baby, Mary?" The little grandmother was on her feet, and she and Mary went out together with a rosy young grandchild of eighteen with curls, who did not dance, and who hoped to get a glimpse of the sleepy baby.

But the grandfather did not hear any of the commotion and noise of living that went on in the room where he sat. He saw only youth beyond the folding doors.

"Swing your ladies," the old fiddler's voice came out.

The fiddler was living the romance of each couple for whom he called his orders. He could enter through a door the grandfather had never heard of, the door of art. An artist understands youth even when he has left it behind, age even when he has not yet reached it.

But the grandfather was not an artist. He was the inarticulate common man that his father and grandfather had been before him. He could not possess and understand; he could not even wish for the thing he needed, since he did not know what it was for which he was moved to formulate a wish.

Out from the background of dancers to his watching eyes, two began to disentangle themselves, until soon it was they alone that he saw. The others were only colour and movement like a curtain, hanging behind the two and setting them off with its rich colour.

"Mother," the old man turned and spoke across the intermingled nieces gossiping between them. "Who are those two dancing?"

"Two?" his wife looked into the front room bewildered.

"I mean nearest the door, the girl with the red dress and the boy laughing, that one with the curly hair?"

"Why, father, don't you recollect?" she reproved him tenderly. "That's Albert's boy and cousin Hilda's girl. They're no relation to each other, but both kin to us by marriage. They're sweethearts, didn't you hear Hilda tell? They're going to be married at Christmas."

Sweethearts! So that was it. That was why they stood out so from the others. It was that that gave them more life, more quickness, more red in the cheeks and black in the hair.

He and Miry had been sweethearts once. But they had not glowed so publicly with the fact. They had been a little ashamed. He had been afraid of happiness, had never let himself enjoy love. To be contented was right, but to be glad was a little shameful, and he had cautiously kept nearer to content. He did not know what thoughts went on in Miry when they courted. He had never even wondered.

She had been seventeen and he eighteen the year they were married. They had gone to district school together and when she was older he had seen her home from church. Then almost with no transition at all she had been milking his cows and he had been eating her biscuits with the jam she had put up from the wild blackberries on the old Taber place.

They had both shrunk from any beauty in their youth and after, from any tremors or wondering. They had helped each other gloss over and ignore the fact that there was such a thing in

life as joy. They had never said its name in their house or fields.

But he with his stern passion for ugliness, with his loyalty for the unlovely hull of things, even he had known at times the longing for that secret sin. It is true that he had never yielded. He never sought beauty in his pasture grass, in his row of poplars, in himself, in Miry. Though the sin called to him, he had been strong. He had stood unshaken for sixty-eight years.

But to-night the temptation was coming again. Something was disturbing him. Was it the young people dancing in there? Out of their bodies these young people had come, out of his and Miry's. It was a strange thought.

He looked across at Miry. It did not occur to him to wonder whether this whimsy had appealed to her too. He never conceived of Miry having thoughts, except thoughts of the proper amount of flour and meal for corn bread and of watering the geraniums in the kitchen window often enough.

Miry was talking now with Bert's wife, Hester, of the babies. The men were grumbling and boasting about crops, or only silently smoking their pipes and watching the dancers.

The old man had a sudden impulse to be alone. He did not want to look now at the dancers. He wanted to get away from them, from what they were doing to him, to be safe.

"I think I'll step out on the porch a little, mother," he spoke up.

"Yes, father," she said absently, with her automatic tenderness that neither irritated nor soothed him, but that soothed her.

II

As he shut the door of the warm room behind him, he blinked against the darkness.

First, the night misted his eyes and blinded him, but in a moment he could see the gate, the pump, the poplars.

Then he saw something else. At the other end of the porch, by the steps some one was standing. He looked closer.

The blur became two people, a boy and a girl. It was the two, Albert's boy and cousin Hilda's girl. They were standing close together and whispering. Her face was looking down, it was in the shadow, but the old man could see her hair, where in the wind it seemed almost alive. The boy was looking at her. He was holding himself awkwardly, as a too big boy does in the classes in school.

But through the awkwardness, even the grandfather vaguely felt, something else was breaking, a new power, a sureness, a joyousness. This was not yet in his body, but it was already in his voice.

"Milly," he was saying. "I've wanted to see you all the evening!"

"You've seen me—too much, Elmer," the girl laughed. "You've danced every time with me! You know we shouldn't do that."

She looked up now, reproach in her face. He met it.

"They know we're to marry," he said. "They must know we're happy and want to touch each other. It'd be silly not to want to. What'd dancing with anyone else be to us?"

"Yes, I know," said the girl, her eyes glowing to his. "I don't mind their thinking what's true. Oh, Elmer, it's a splendid thing to love a man!"

Her voice was like a singer's in a church, full of holy ecstasy, confessing to the glory of the Lord, and wanting to be heard.

"It's a splendid thing to love a girl!" gave back Elmer, his unflung head proud of her, glorying in her.

The grandfather, overhearing, felt a little ashamed of them.

"Elmer, look at the poplars," Hilda's girl pulled his eyes around to them by running her white hand into his hair and twisting the head in the proper direction.

"Like shadows in the afternoon, long and thin, ain't they?" said the well-trained Elmer appreciatively. Poplars are only poplars to most men until they know a woman well.

"And the hill, and the fence. Everything's so still and beautiful to-night," went on the girl. "But I think," she looked up at the murky sky and then stood in a listening attitude, "there's a sound of stars."

The boy smiled at her and they both listened whimsically.

Then suddenly the smile faded out of his face.

"You're the loveliest thing of all, prettier than the night, or the trees," he said, his voice tense.

Then, "Oh, Milly, Milly," he was sobbing, and as his lips touched her white cheek, there was awe and wonder in his wide eyes. Then he kissed her again, passionately, on her mouth, a long locked kiss, so that she could not breathe.

In the darkness the grandfather blushed.

But when the boy raised his head again there was no shame in his face, only a joy so frank that it shocked the watching old man.

The grandfather had a sudden panic of fear that they might see him. He was afraid, not that the knowledge that they were overheard would embarrass them, but that it would not.

He stood in tense silence for a moment lest they see; then, when their faces were turned to each other again, he stole back into the house.

He had been away longer than he knew, for it was late, and the elder people were trying to make their children stop dancing.

"One dance more! Only one!" the girls called in their sweet voices and the boys shouted to the fiddler for another tune.

But the fiddler, with a word in his ear from the elders, shook his head and opened his fiddle case. Not until they saw the old violin tucked away out of sight did the girls give up, but then they did cheerfully and quieted their partners with calls of things to be done "To-morrow!"

The grandmother and the oldest daughter gave out the candles, already lighted, and one by one the guests went up the splintered old stairs. Even the twitter of good nights could not lift the heavy silence from the house. It seemed almost sinister after the loud gaiety of a few moments before.

The grandmother was in the kitchen, kept by the few simple night tasks that she refused to let anyone else attend to. All the others were gone now.

No, not all. For as the old man sat for the moment alone in the shadow, he heard the noise of steps and from the deserted front room came his oldest granddaughter and her husband. Ellen took her candle from the table and started slowly to go upstairs. On the first step she paused.

"I only wanted one last look at it all, Jim," she said in the voice sweet with her mother's personality but strong with her own. "It's all just as it was when I was a little girl. How strange to be a little girl! How strange to be a woman!" she laughed down into her husband's eyes as he stood below her.

"It was in this house I first saw you," Jim said, a little ashamed to be awed.

"I played alone and made up lovely stories about father and mother and my dolls," Ellen mused. "How beautiful the poplar seemed to me, and the hill! —And you, that day!—And oh, how sweet it's been since!"

"All of it, all of it," said Jim, not ashamed now.

"We were together yesterday, last night," Ellen went on. "But to-night it's as if we'd been parted for years. You're so new to me, so wonderful."

"It's you, you!" Jim answered, his words choking his throat.

He looked up at his wife's face and at the light of the candle on her warm neck, and then he caught her in his arms.

After a moment they went up the stairs together.

The grandfather was trembling. Their passion had reached out and touched him. Their joy had pulled him from his place of safety and left him alone in a new world.

It was as if joy and beauty were sud-

denly embodied and had become visible before him, as if they two joined forces and became one Nemesis banded to have vengeance upon him for neglecting them, for daring to plan a life without their control.

He was afraid—of nothing, he told himself. It was nothing. What was it? He had seen two youngsters kiss, he had heard a man and wife speak a few words, and his world was shaken.

III

AFTERWARD, in bed, it all came again, heavier with meaning.

He lay for hours in the stillness and thought and remembered and pondered. How clear things had seemed in his youth and how unreal they had actually been!

How unreal were these fancies that crowded him against the wall, as it were, to-night, and yet how they clarified things!

He lay there a long while, and for the first time in his life thought out things calmly and truly.

He saw himself and his wife in the mirror of fact, at last, though he half thought that it was fact into which he had been always looking.

They had both been afraid of beauty and they had helped each other to flee from it. They had feared joy, and together they had managed to elude it.

They had been poor, and they had forbidden themselves the one extravagance of the poor, the right to feast on life. They had denied each other until the denial had become truth. Fugitives from joy—what an epitaph!

The old man, lying there awake, felt the sudden agony of it, and as his thoughts writhed through the long night he was glad that the old woman by his side would never see. He knew that she understood their life and themselves even less than he, that she was even more inarticulate than he.

About four, when the birds wake suddenly and begin to sing together, feeling his uneasiness, she lay weeping softly, with caught breath, so that he should not hear. Lying cautiously still, he knew that she wept, but he knew, too, that she would never know what it was that made her weep.

And for that he was grimly glad.

THE first age of man is when he thinks about all the wicked things he is going to do. This is called the age of innocence.

AVOID the truth. Nearly everything that is true is in bad taste.

BAD news comes by aeroplane, but good news travels in a Ford.

MY LOVES: THEIR RISE AND FALL

By John Hamilton

I

Paula

PAULA, as graceful as the Victory Goddess, skated across the frozen pond. Her red tam fell from her head and lay like a pool of hot blood on the cold ice. It began to snow. The flakes fell on Paula's uncovered hair and clung. It came to me suddenly how beautiful Paula would look with the silver locks of old age . . . and I fell in love with Paula.

The sun appeared and melted the snow on Paula's hair, which fell about her cheeks in drab, straggly wisps. The drops, trickling down, streaked her face with rouge . . . and I fell out of love with Paula.

II

Patricia

PATRICIA, dainty as a Watteau shepherdess, fragile as a teacup. Narrow violet veins quivered across her eyelids. The tips of her slim fingers were tinted like bud-roses. As I encircled her slender waist it was as if I spanned a strip of mist . . . and I fell in love with Patricia.

I spilled a drop of orange pekoe on her dainty French frock and Patricia said: "Damn your awkwardness!" . . . And I fell out of love with Patricia.

III

Madeline

SHE lay on a couch of deep magenta velvet, the gold glow of a Chinese lamp suffusing her. Her gown was jade, the colour of her eyes, and scant. Her fragrance was of cyclamen. Her fingers were heavy with rings. She smoked a long amber cigarette. By her side was a teakwood table. On it was a bust of a satyr, a bowl of heavy red roses, a tall decanter, and a book of Sanscrit verse. Lazily she covered her lips with a rose petal . . . and I fell in love with Madeline.

Sitting at the side of Madeline, I dislodged a pillow. Beneath it was a novel by Gene Stratton Porter . . . and I fell out of love with Madeline.

IV

Valerie

THE chattering of butterfly-girls bored me. I saw Valerie. Valerie was as placid-browed and simply coiffured as Juno. Her eyes behind wide spectacles were hothouse pansy beds. Her gown was a severely cut tweed; her shoes English and strong. Under her arm she carried several stout-leathered books. Wearied of ballroom banter, I longed to converse with Valerie about Strabism, and Adminthology and the Xiphias. "May I talk to you?" I entreated. She nodded . . . and I fell in love with Valerie.

I led her to a secluded alcove. "Some luck!" she said. "I hear you know John Drew. Tell me about him" . . . and I fell out of love with Valerie.

FOOTSTEPS

By George B. Jenkins, Jr.

I

A FAINT splash came from the depths of the well. The woman, leaning over the opening, heard the sound and shuddered. She was breathing heavily, for her exertions had almost exhausted her. A dead man is an unwieldy burden. She had half-carried, half-dragged the body from near the kitchen fifteen yards away. Its feet had been continually in the way, but the woman had laboured, working until the perspiration had dampened the hair upon her forehead,—until she had brought it to the well.

She came back to the house, wiping her hands unconsciously upon her skirt. She felt no regret, merely a feeling of relief that she would no longer have to listen to his continual nagging. No longer would it be necessary for her to lie and deceive him.

She looked at her clothes in surprise. Her bloodstained hands had made crimson splotches where she had wiped them. She washed her hands and took off her cotton dress. She stuffed it in the stove and listened a moment until she was sure it was burning.

As she listened the familiar sounds of night came to her. Frogs croaked in a nearby pond, their voices rising and falling, each one trying to outdo the other in volume. A brisk breeze scampered round the house ruffling the leaves that lay upon the ground.

Though her breath still came fast, the woman went quickly upstairs and took a new suit-case from its hiding place in the attic.

Once in her bed-room, she began hurriedly throwing things into the suit-case.

She worked feverishly, as though each moment was precious. She threw her clothes into the bag, making no attempt at packing them in so that they would not be wrinkled. Her movements were swift and she glanced about her apprehensively as she worked.

The room was sparsely furnished. A bed occupied one corner, and by its side was a cheap wooden chair. On the chair was a book, and on top of the book a bloodstained hammer. The woman cast frightened glances toward the chair at intervals. She seemed anxious to leave the room as quickly as possible. As she journeyed about the room, she kept as far away from the chair as she could.

She stood before the bureau and pulled a few handkerchiefs from one of the drawers. She put several of them in the suitcase, and threw the rest back in the drawer.

Crossing the room, and keeping as far from the chair as the room would permit, she went to a closet in the wall, and took a skirt and a cheap cotton petticoat from a hook. She again gave the chair a wide berth, and then put these two articles into the suitcase. It was full to overflowing now, and the woman pulled down the cover of the bag and tried to fasten it.

But the bag would not fasten. The clothes within it were not folded, but were thrown in loosely. Some of them protruded beyond the edge of the suitcase and kept the top from fitting snugly.

A kerosene lamp was burning on the bureau. By its light the woman could be seen to be thirty-five, and looking even older. Farm work leaves its mark

upon men, but upon women its effect is even worse.

This woman had done the monotonous round of chores upon the farm until she had lost all pretensions to good looks. Her hair fell stringily upon her cheeks. Her face was pale, and shiny, and her faded blue eyes possessed no spark of animation. Instead, in their depths a gleam of fear stared at the shadows and the corners of the room.

The woman stopped, and listened.

A footstep sounded upon the floor below.

She listened, every nerve taut, to the footsteps. They went into the kitchen on the floor below. Slow, ponderous footsteps, *the footsteps of a man who felt perfectly at home!*

As she listened the woman's eyes grew wide with fear.

Sweat glistened upon her forehead and trickled down upon her chin. In mental agony she listened to the footsteps going from one side of the kitchen to the other. Slow, ponderous, heavy footsteps, the footsteps of a man who felt perfectly at home.

The steps came into the hallway and then returned to the kitchen and moved around in the room.

The woman, with her eyes glazed by terror, listened, listened. If only the footsteps would stop or pause for a moment! Instead they kept up their steady pound, pound, upon the uncarpeted floor.

The footsteps left the kitchen and came down the hall. The woman stood rigid, listening, listening. If the footsteps came up the stairs she knew she would go crazy, she knew she would shriek, shriek. She knew she would shriek until she fainted and fell to the floor.

But the footsteps turned and went into the parlour, the room they used so seldom. Only when they had visitors was the parlour opened, and its atmosphere was musty from disuse. What were the footsteps doing in the parlour? The woman wondered, but did not have the courage to investigate.

Soon the footsteps came out of the parlour and went back to the kitchen. The woman listened to them as they moved around. She was waiting, waiting, for something.

The footsteps hesitated for a moment and then went out into the yard. There was the sound of a body falling limply against the house. When the woman heard this she fell in a heap on the floor.

The footsteps she had heard were precisely like those of her husband. The sound of the body falling was precisely like the sound he had made after she had fractured his skull with a hammer just two hours before.

II

THE woman lay senseless upon the floor while the kerosene lamp burned lower and lower. The oil was almost exhausted when she turned, and began to moan. She whimpered a little when she came back to consciousness, and then she lay with her eyes staring into the dense blackness of the window. The lamp burned lower and lower.

In a few moments the woman raised herself to a sitting position and listened.

The footsteps had stopped. Only the creakings and soft whisperings of the house came to her. She climbed to her feet and turned again to the suitcase.

She must leave the house at once. John would be angry. He did not like to be kept waiting. But when she told him about the footsteps he would understand and not be angry with her.

She looked at the cheap alarm-clock on the bureau and saw that it was almost midnight. She had promised to meet John at ten o'clock. They would . . .

Her hand stopped in mid-air. What was that? What was that fumbling at the door? There was no one in the house but herself. Someone seemed to be breathing on the other side of the door. She stood rigid until every muscle in her body screamed at the tension.

Still that breathing on the other side of the door. The woman moved noiselessly away from the door.

Something, someone, was breathing softly in the hallway outside the door of her bedroom.

"Who is there?" she called, and did not recognize the sound of her own voice. Was that her voice, that voice cracked with terror?

She waited tensely, hoping a familiar voice would answer.

There was no reply. Whoever was waiting outside the door, was waiting until she should leave the room with the suitcase.

The woman backed away from the door. The menacing thing or person—she did not know which—could not come through the door and get her. Suddenly she wondered if the door was locked.

If it was locked she was safe. She could climb out of the window with the suitcase and then climb down the woodshed and to the ground.

The flame in the lamp sank lower and lower. The woman was near the bureau and the suitcase. She took out part of the articles in the suitcase and then closed it. She had no difficulty locking it now. Her eyes were on the door while she snapped the catches on the suitcase. Perhaps the thing could open the door, perhaps the door was not locked.

She started toward the window, with her eyes still fixed upon the door. She must keep her eyes upon it. Slowly she moved, and softly. She must leave the room without that unseen person knowing that she had made her departure.

The woman crept toward the window.

She moved slowly, cautiously, making as little noise as she could.

Something touched her in the back. She turned and found the chair beside the bed was in her way.

The woman picked up the blood-stained hammer. This was the hammer she had used to kill her husband. As she grasped it in her hand the blood upon the handle clung to her palm as though it wished to stay there, for ever, and publish to the world what she had done.

The woman turned toward the door again. She was desperate. If there was a man on the other side of the door he had best prepare to defend himself. Did he think she would hesitate about killing him? Hadn't she killed her husband? She was not afraid of any man on earth, not one but would die if she could get close to him with that hammer.

The woman laid down the suitcase and crept stealthily toward the door. She would surprise this softly breathing person. She would pull the door open suddenly and spring upon him. First a blow upon the head, enough to stun him. And then she would treat this person as she had her husband. Her husband would not feel lonesome if there were another body in the well beside him.

The kerosene lamp began to flicker. Soon it would sputter and go out. The woman must reach the door before the lamp went out, otherwise she would not be able to see the person who was waiting there.

She reached the door and listened to the breathing outside. Her hand came slowly to the door-knob and with a sudden wrench, she snatched the door open and stepped into the hallway with the hammer up-raised.

There was no one there. The hallway was empty. Not a sound, not a movement. . . .

The woman caught up the lamp and stepped into the hall. She walked to the head of the stairs and looked down. Still not a sound. And not a second before she had heard someone breathing outside the door of her room!

The lamp began to sputter. It would go out in a moment. The woman decided to return to her room and get the suitcase. She would run down to the road, to where John was waiting for her. They had planned to go to New York, and begin life again. New

York was the place to hide! Two people would be lost in that enormous hive.

The lamp sputtered, sputtered. She walked toward her bedroom and . . .

The footsteps had begun again! They were in the kitchen!

Slow, ponderous footsteps, they were the footsteps of a man who felt perfectly at home. They were heavy, solid, unhurried.

The woman stood frozen with terror. The footsteps were unmistakable. *They were the footsteps of her husband!*

As she stood there her mind flashed pictures of their life together. Their courtship, and marriage, and the day they came to the farm. Then the long weary days of work, and the beginning of his cruelty to her. He seemed to take a fiendish delight in torturing her soul. Her body was too weary after the day's work was over to suffer. But her mind was comparatively fresh. And he tortured her mind until she hated him with every waking thought.

He took delight in saying things that would wound her feelings. He soon discovered the things she was sensitive about, and he took a hellish pleasure in speaking constantly of them.

Every day for the past four years she had been twitted about the details of her cousin's compulsory marriage. Every day for the past four years she had been told that she was plain and unattractive. Every day for the past four years she had been told that she couldn't leave the farm because her husband was ashamed to be seen with her, and he could not trust her with anyone else.

Then John Fleming had taken the next farm. He was a slow-moving, hard-working man, terribly poor. Sometimes he had come over to borrow tools, or farming implements, for he was not able to buy all he needed. The woman had been glad to see him. He was someone to talk to, and she craved human companionship. They had very few visitors on the farm. John was pleasant in his slow, quiet way. She began to look forward to his comings.

At first her husband had not noticed John's visits. The woman remembered how John had begun to come over on small, unnecessary errands, and how he took much more time than was needed. He began to forget what he had come over for and have to be reminded to take back the article he had asked for. Then she began to think that perhaps he came over to see her, and the thought had made her look at John with tender eyes.

Her husband had a prosperous year, but John's farming had been a failure. He decided to go to New York. The woman knew that John worshipped her. She knew that she loved him more than she ever did her husband. She told John she would go to New York with him. John could find work in the city. There was always work there for a willing man. And she would be away from the eternal nagging of her husband. John was kind and gentle to her.

To-night a wagon had driven into the yard, and a man climbed from it slowly. The woman had looked through the kitchen window with fierce hatred filling her mind. The night was dark, impenetrable, yet the woman knew that it was her husband who had returned. It was like her husband to come home unexpectedly soon, to interfere with her plans, to keep her from going away with John. The wagon was a mass of blackness, scarcely defined against the blacker mass that was the barn. The man moved slowly toward the kitchen door.

A wave of frightful hatred swept over her. Her husband's early return dealt a death-blow to her hopes of happiness. John would have to leave without her. She would be compelled to spend her life with the man she loathed, would have to listen to his endless naggings, would be tortured by his brutalities.

Blind rage possessed her, a fury that took no thought of consequences, an ungovernable passion that flooded her

brain. As the man's figure drew near to the house, she snatched up the hammer, and slipped out into the enveloping blackness of the night.

Her movements were rapid. She was waiting when the man came around the corner of the house. As he came slowly past her, she put her whole weight behind the blow. The blunt, round head of the hammer struck him just back of the ear. The man dropped without a sound.

The woman's soul flamed with hatred. Again and again and again she struck with the hammer. It twisted in her hands and blood flowed from his wounds and upon the ground, as he lay face downward.

They had planned, she and John, to leave for the city to-night. After she had finished her chores he was to take her to the railroad station. John had enough money to pay their fare to New York. She would be away from the taunting voice of her husband. . . .

Carrying it at arms' length, the woman had pulled and tugged the body away from the house. The wooden railing around the mouth of the well had seemed determined to frustrate her. It seemed to be obstinately tall, as if it did not want the body to pass over it. At last . . .

In the room where the woman stood, the lamp sputtered and went out. The woman shuddered.

III

THE tiny creaking, the whispering noises, the occasional cracking of a board, began to make images in the woman's mind. She lived over again the scene outside the kitchen, the slow advance of the man, the limpness of his body when he fell. She put her hands over her face to try and shut out the horror. She began to moan, to whine, to whimper.

The footsteps began downstairs again. They were slow, unhurried, ponderous, the footsteps of a man who felt perfectly at home. She recognized them, for she could have told her husband's footsteps from a million others. She shrank and quivered from the sound.

The footsteps came from the kitchen. She listened tensely . . . wondering if they were going into the parlour again. They passed the parlour door, and her tension relaxed slightly.

She felt around in the darkness for her suitcase. She was becoming somewhat accustomed to the footsteps. She knew her husband was dead. She had thrown him down the well. He had been heavy. It had taken all her strength to drag him so far.

The footsteps were going up and down the hallway. The woman shivered. She must leave the house, she must meet John. He was waiting for her.

She opened the door of the bedroom and looked into the dense blackness of the hallway. On the floor below the footsteps stopped—and then began again. They left the kitchen, came down the hall, and then . . . *They were coming up the stairs!*

The woman shrieked. Her voice cut the air like a swift sword. Fear and terror and agony pierced the walls of the house. Her lower jaw trembled. She could hear the noise of her teeth striking together.

Slowly the footsteps sounded on the stairs. The woman sank down on the floor and shriek after shriek tore at the darkness.

The footsteps came gradually nearer. Her eyes were fixed upon the stairs; she was waiting for the body to appear. Her eyes strained from their sockets, her hands twitched and tore at her dress as she waited, and waiting, shot scream after scream into the black blanket of the hallway.

The steps neared the top of the stairs.

The woman suddenly stopped screaming and listened, quivering.

The fourth step from the top was loose, one of the boards squeaked when it was trod upon. The woman had noticed it ever since they had come to live in the house. She was waiting

until the footsteps reached that step. Whenever that board was stepped on, it squeaked.

The steps sounded on the stairs, while the woman listened. How far up had they come? She wished she had counted them. Eight—was it—or ten? The twelfth step was loose.

Step. The next would be the one.

Step. The woman tore frantically for her room. The board had squeaked!

With herculean strength the woman struggled with the bed. She would put it against the door. If the door was forced open she would be waiting with the hammer. She would kill the ghost of her husband.

The footsteps came down the hall while she waited, shivering, trembling, shuddering.

Then they went into the room across the hall.

The woman crept away from the door and tugged at the bed. With the energy of desperation she moved it enough to allow her to leave the room. Picking up the suitcase and the hammer, she opened the door.

As she stepped into the hallway, she felt a hand upon her arm.

Fear snatched away her strength and left her faint and gasping. The smell of cheap whisky floated on the air. A familiar voice came to her, a voice she thought was stilled for ever.

"What's the matter?" her husband asked. "What 'you holler'n' for?" Drunken suspicion showed in his voice. "You holler'n' for John? Say, what's 'is team doin' in the yard, anyhow?"

She knew her husband was standing before her, that it was his hand she felt upon her arm. Comprehension stunned her.

She had killed John!

The suitcase and hammer slipped from her hand, and fell to the floor. The noise of their falling sounded curiously loud in the strangely quiet house. John had driven into the yard to get her, and it was his body that now lay at the bottom of the well!

The woman tore herself from her husband's grasp. Wild with grief and half-crazed with horror she sped down the stairs. She had killed the man who cared for her, the man who was willing to share his pittance with her, the man who wanted to take her from her unbearable surroundings.

She raced into the kitchen, her breath coming in quick moans. Out through the back door she sped, straight toward the well. John was waiting. Patient, quiet, dependable, John was waiting.

"I'm coming, John, I'm coming," she screamed.

The water in the well had splashed once when the body had come twisting down. Now the water splashed again.

OBEDIENCE in a woman is the faculty of harmonizing her husband's commands with her own inclinations.

BOOK-KEEPING has been traced as far back as ancient Peru—book-keepers have been traced everywhere.

WILL scientists find a new use for the cherry?

THE BEAUTIFUL THING*

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Murray Leinster and George B. Jenkins, Jr.

THE scene is a portion of the mezzanine floor of a really good hotel. It is not the sort of hotel that has acquired the reputation of being expensive, or the sort that in Oklahoma is known as first-class. It is a hotel of which the mythical man in the street has never heard, a hotel in which a delicate guest would be quite sure of not meeting commercial travellers, and delegates to Knights of Pythias conventions, out-of-town buyers.

Against the subtly tinted wall we see a broad settee on which are two people who take comfort as a matter of course.

Well-designed electric lamps throw a subdued glow over the floor at their bases. They contrive to cast a gentle light upon the settee—the sort of light which shows a woman at her best. The rest of the stage is lighted, but not obtrusively. Whoever designs the setting must disregard entirely the dictates of Mr. Belasco. The effect is one of comfort, even of expensive comfort, but it is the sort of comfort prepared for people who take comfort as a matter of course.

There are four people in the play. The first to be seen is CHARLES, *who is in his early forties and has attained to civilization in manner and dress. He could not possibly be portrayed by an actor who wore a striped grey waistcoat with evening clothes, or who possessed a double chin.* CHARLES' *hair is pleasantly grey and his face is the face of an aristocrat. This does not mean that he looks like the popular idea of a French nobleman going to the guillotine. He is a gentleman who would never think of referring to himself as one. He is a man who secures service such as other people tip for in vain, because he has always been accustomed to such service, and treats servants with enough of courtesy to secure it in return.*

MARION *is a woman of an age which is fairly uncertain but is none the less charming. She is really beautiful, and there is genuine humour in the curve of her mouth. A professional actress would never be able to understand* MARION *and could never portray her properly. She does not smile when she is vaguely uncertain of the meaning of a remark. She has conquered the feminine instinct to make life a series of dramatic situations. She possesses the peculiarly masculine attribute of sportsmanship. And she is really beautiful.*

BOBBY *who appears later, is precisely what* MARION *calls him. He is a very young man, manfully striving to conceal his youth, and in time he will be a pleasant person to know. If he makes an ass of himself occasionally, it is only to be expected.* BOBBY *is still young, and since he has the virtue of youth he must be allowed its compensating crudities.*

* Acting rights reserved.

BOBBY could not be played by an ambitious actor. He has no "fat" in his part, but he will be worth knowing some day.

CECILY is young, but she simply must not be played as an ingénue. CECILY is a charming girl who is really delightful to look upon. It should be remembered that CHARLES likes her, and CHARLES is a person of discrimination. She dresses in good taste, in the fashion that most becomes her, and she does not affect vivacity as a substitute for girlishness. She is herself.

Shortly after the curtain rises, CHARLES walks slowly into view, looks at his watch, considers its dial for an instant, and sinks comfortably down upon the settee. He gives the impression of having settled down for what he suspects will be a long and tiresome wait. Just as he is fumbling for his cigarette-case, MARION appears from the opposite direction, walking as leisurely as CHARLES had done. She does not look at CHARLES, but is about to pass him when he glances up. Surprise and pleasure show themselves on his face, and he rises quickly.

CHARLES

It can't be—is it Marion?

(*She stops, and pleasure as great as his own shows in her expression.*)

MARION

Why, Charles!

(*They shake hands with the peculiar inexpressiveness of people who are sincerely glad to see each other, yet feel strangely embarrassed by the unexpectedness of their meeting.*)

CHARLES

I really doubted that it was actually you, Marion, but I knew there could not be two women with that little smile perpetually at the corners of their mouths.

MARION

(*Smiling indulgently.*) The same Charles! What have you been doing and what has happened to you since—Paris?

CHARLES

The most tragic thing that has happened to me is that nothing has happened to me, and I have been extremely busy at my usual occupation, which, as you know, is nothing. And you—?

MARION

(*Shrugging her shoulders.*) Oh, I—

CHARLES

(*Gently.*) You have been beautiful.

MARION

(*Irrelevantly.*) You're rather a dear, Charles. But what are you waiting here for? I see you wearing your patient-angel look, which means you think you are due for a long wait.

CHARLES

(*Smiling.*) You know me very well. Why should I be waiting?

MARION

(*Watching his smile.*) A charming woman, of course. But why so early?

CHARLES

(*In semi-comic resignation.*) She is almost invariably late, but at times she has moments of most disconcerting punctuality, so I suffer. And you, of course—

MARION

A dear boy.

CHARLES

(*Raising his eyebrows a trifle, still smiling.*) We *do* understand each other, Marion. After what we were to each other, do you think anyone else would talk as frankly as we do?

MARION

It does seem that to have shared every thought in past times leads to concealment of every thought of present days, doesn't it?

CHARLES

Let's sit down.

(*They do so, he waiting instinctively until she has seated herself comfortably.*

He glances slyly at her from the corner of his eyes.)

CHARLES

Do you expect to wait long, Marion?

MARION

(*With the worldly wisdom of a woman.*) Bobby is quite pathetically trying to be indifferent, and his idea of indifference is so youthful! I have seen him drive past my hotel five separate times before he decided he was tardy enough to impress me.

CHARLES

(*Humorously retrospective.*) I did the same thing myself, Marion. We men are all alike.

MARION

You are deliciously so, Charles. The third time you ever saw me, you had agreed to meet me in the lounge of my hotel and you were twenty minutes late. I was sitting patiently by one of the writing-tables and saw you in a mirror. You looked at your watch at least a dozen times in those twenty minutes—and then you explained in a superior manner that you had met a man in the lobby who detained you. You had been hiding behind a group of palms by the door.

CHARLES

(*Slightly vexed.*) I never knew you suspected that, Marion.

MARION

(*Confidently*). If you had, you'd have been angry with me. That, also, is very much like a man.

CHARLES

(*Triumphantly.*) But I knew something I never told you, too. I sent you a little note with some flowers. I'd known you two weeks. And the next day we had tea together and your purse fell open on the table. I saw my note in it. You'd been carrying it with you. You never dreamed I saw the note, but it heartened me wonderfully. (*She smiles wisely.*) Confound it! Marion, did you know that, too?

MARION

(*Half-apologetically.*) You were so much the boy then, Charles. You were a dear boy, but you were so young, and so shy. . . . I did like you immensely, Charles.

CHARLES

(*Amused, yet annoyed with himself.*) You must have played with me, Marion.

MARION

(*Smiling.*) Never. But there are little artifices one must employ.

CHARLES

(*Lightly.*) Such as my pretended indifference.

MARION

It added zest to the game. One never knew whether or not the little trick would have the effect one wished. And success was so important!

CHARLES

(*Quickly.*) Was it important, Marion?

MARION

Hush, Charles! Never wake ghosts.

CHARLES

Not pleasant ghosts?

MARION

(*With a little hesitation.*) True, there are pleasant ghosts. Since it was so long ago. . . . It *was* important, Charles. Now I have bared my secret. (*She smiles at him.*)

CHARLES

(*Thoughtfully.*) And neither of us dared be frank. It was vastly important to me, too.

MARION

It would be curious to be frank. There are always artifices and counter-artifices; elaborate deceptions to reach a complete understanding.

CHARLES

It must be that men are too timid to be frank, and women too wise. And men are supposed to be such bold pursuers!

MARION

(*With a smiling sigh.*) You have no idea, Charles, how hard it is to persuade a desirable man that he is a bold pursuer. I think a woman would care much more for a man if she dared expose her primal ferocity.

CHARLES

Instead of which she has to infuse that ferocity in him?

MARION

Precisely. I do like Bobby, but it would be so much pleasanter simply to —kiss him upon occasion when I wished to, instead of having to implant the idea in his mind that he wishes to kiss me.

CHARLES

It would be a novelty to be courted in that fashion.

MARION

(*Laughing.*) Don't tempt me, Charles, or I may live up to my words. Do you remember how I used to trace, very gravely, your eyebrows with my fingertips?

CHARLES

You are the only woman I ever knew who had that little trick. It always made me want to kiss you. You were so serious about it.

MARION

(*With twinkling eyes.*) That was primal ferocity.

CHARLES

By gad! Marion, you must have made me do exactly as you pleased!

MARION

(*Shaking her head.*) No-o-o, Charles. I only tried to make your wishes accord with mine.

CHARLES

(*Whimsically.*) And I must admit that your ideas were pleasant ones.

MARION

(*Reproachfully.*) Charles, you aren't annoyed?

CHARLES

Of course not. It was beautiful to love you.

MARION

(*Quickly.*) It was love.

CHARLES

(*With a reminiscent smile.*) Marion, you were the first woman I ever really cared about. And I have no regrets. Have you?

MARION

A woman never regrets having loved.

CHARLES

(*Thoughtfully.*) A man nearly always does. He feels such a cad when he stops. (*He looks at his watch, but without great interest.*)

MARION

Is she very pretty, Charles?

CHARLES

(*In a flat tone.*) She is quite beautiful.

MARION

I am not too curious, am I?

CHARLES

Of course not. It's odd, but I don't think I could resent curiosity from you. There's a feeling I can't explain. . . .

MARION

We do understand each other, Charles. Somehow, I don't think you care for her as much as you would like.

CHARLES

When a man is my age, his emotions lose their first keenness. She is charming, though.

MARION

And at my age. . . . It is queer to be talking of ages. Bobby is so very young. He is a dear boy, but—he is so young.

CHARLES

It is strange how the virtue of youth in time becomes a vice.

MARION

(*With a faraway smile.*) We were young together.

CHARLES

Gad! Weren't we young! Do you remember what we quarrelled about, Marion?

MARION

No-o-o, not exactly.

CHARLES

But wasn't it tragic? Some little disagreement that now we would think hardly deserving a second thought. . . .

MARION

I think we would get along better now.

CHARLES

Yes. We've both learned many things. A man should love and lose at least once for every year he's to live with his wife.

MARION

(*Quickly.*) You're not married, Charles.

CHARLES

(*Ruefully.*) No. I told you I cared more for you. Afterwards, I looked to find myself as deeply stirred as you stirred me, and failing, I looked farther. But there's no love as sweet as the first one.

MARION

(*Smiling as she looks into the past.*) No. . . . First love is sweetest and keenest, but also it's cruelest.

CHARLES

It is cruel. It does not understand.

MARION

And until you look back, years after, you never know. (*Lightly.*) We're growing sentimental, Charles.

CHARLES

(*Smiling thoughtfully.*) No matter. It's real. We have learned so much.

MARION

If one could only learn these things beforehand! All our half-forgotten tragedies, which at the time seemed to tumble the world about our ears, would never be.

CHARLES

Perhaps it would be pleasant to miss our tragedies. I don't know. There's something they seem to prepare us for, but we have missed it.

MARION

(*Hesitating.*) Perhaps—perhaps they are to prepare us for our last love, greatly different from the first, but maybe even sweeter.

CHARLES

(*Moodily.*) Maybe.

MARION

We have learned to understand and to forgive. I wonder . . .

CHARLES

(*Slowly.*) That is the difference between men and women. Men know dead love cannot be revived, but women are for ever attempting the miracle.

MARION

(*Lightly, though wincing a little.*) I am rebuffed.

CHARLES

(*Quickly.*) No, no, Marion. Please. . . . There is something different about you. First love never quite dies. There is always tenderness left behind. And you—

(BOBBY *enters from the left. He is struggling to affect an air of ease and assurance.* MARION *looks at him and smiles.*)

MARION

(*Reproachfully.*) Bobby, late as usual! And leaving me to anguish until your arrival.

BOBBY

(*Stammering a little, but secretly proud that she has noticed his carefully planned tardiness.*) I'm awfully sorry,

Marion, but I met a chap and he delayed me. I'm not very late, am I?

MARION

Hours and hours. Bobby, this is a very old friend of mine.

(CHARLES *rises and shakes hands.* BOBBY *is a trifle confused and openly envies the older man his poise.*)

BOBBY

(*Very much the man-about-town.*) Pleasure, I'm sure. Awfully much obliged to you for amusing Marion. Perhaps she won't be so much annoyed with me, since you were here.

CHARLES

(*Smiling.*) I am sure she will forgive you.

MARION

Bobby, I have no flowers. Run and get me a really nice corsage bouquet, won't you? Running the errand is penance for being late.

BOBBY

(*Gallantly.*) Then since I may run an errand for you, I'm not sorry I'm late.

(*He hurries off in the direction from which he came.* MARION *turns to* CHARLES, *a trifle pale.*)

MARION

Charles, you were saying . . .

CHARLES

(*Irrelevantly.*) I like Bobby.

MARION

He is a dear boy, Charles. But—

CHARLES

Marion, do you remember how wonderful it was when you first told me you loved me?

MARION

I had been longing to tell you for days, Charles.

CHARLES

I keep thinking of Bobby. He cares tremendously for you, Marion.

MARION

Perhaps. But he is so young . . .

CHARLES

(*Whimsically, but with a touch of tenderness.*) It is a beautiful thing to have loved you, Marion. Even now some of the old romance clings. It would be perfect for us to begin again, having learned what we have learned.

MARION

(*Softly.*) It would be perfect, Charles.

CHARLES

(*Touching her hand gently.*) But there is Bobby. He is very young, when love is at its keenest and sweetest. It is a beautiful thing to be young and to love you, Marion. Dare I take that beautiful thing from him?

(BOBBY *reënters with the corsage bouquet.*)

BOBBY

This one was the best he had, Marion, but it is a poor best.

MARION

(*Turning her attention to him with ready charm.*) It is very nice, Bobby.

CHARLES

(*With a suggestion of hesitation.*) I shall hope to see you again, Marion.

(CECILY *enters slowly from the right.*)

BOBBY

(*Softly.*) Great Godfrey!

(CHARLES *turns and sees* CECILY. *He goes toward her with a smile.*)

CHARLES

Late as usual, Cecily.

CECILY

(*Giving him her hand.*) I'm sorry —but only a little.

(*She smiles roguishly at him, then her glance travels past him to* BOBBY. *Her eyes widen.*)

CHARLES

I have been entertained. This is an old, old friend of mine. (MARION

smiles and shakes hands.) And this is Bobby.

BOBBY

(*In a hushed tone.*) You are the girl that was in the Kent's box at the opera, to-night a week ago. Aren't you?

CECILY

(*A shade too quickly.*) Yes—that is, I imagine it must have been about a week ago.

BOBBY

(*Inanely.*) I remember.

MARION

You two know each other?

BOBBY

(*Half-apologetically.*) N-not until now. I just happened to recognize her.

(*He turns and smiles frankly at* CECILY. *She looks up at* CHARLES, *then returns* BOBBY'S *smile, though with a suggestion of mystery in her own.*)

MARION

Your memory is splendid, Bobby.

CHARLES

(*To* MARION.) My memory was just as good, once upon a time.

MARION

(*To* CHARLES. *The other two are conversing readily about nothing whatever.*) It was, Charles.

BOBBY

(*Turning, with a tinge of conscience.*) Er—I forgot. Excuse me, Marion. (CHARLES *moves forward to take possession of* CECILY. BOBBY *hesitates and flushes.*) Er—(*reluctantly*) I suppose . . .

CHARLES

(*With a perfect blending of tentativeness and the assurance of an old friend.*) You two are going to dinner, aren't you?

BOBBY

(*Gratefully.*) Why, yes.

CHARLES

(*With a disarming smile.*) So are we. May I suggest—

BOBBY

(*In a rush.*) Let's have it together.

CHARLES

Just what I was about to say. Marion and I have hardly started our reminiscences.

MARION

And you two haven't begun.

BOBBY

(*Flushing again.*) You talk to me as if I were a child, Marion.

CECILY

Is it so dreadful?

CHARLES

Marion often indulges in the feminine trick of being most disconcerting when she wishes to be most kind.

MARION

Charles will give away all my secrets.

(BOBBY *is again deep in conversation with* CECILY. MARION *turns to him, then looks at* CHARLES *with an appealing moué.* CHARLES *raises his eyebrows.* MARION'S *lips curve in a whimsical fashion. She speaks in a low voice that is quite without rancour and is really apologizing for* BOBBY.)

MARION

He is very young.

CHARLES

(*In a tone that matches her own, smiling.*) It is a beautiful thing to be young. But we—

(MARION *looks at him for an instant and then smiles as she must have smiled years before. He returns the smile, looking at her as he, also, must have looked at her years before. He makes an impulsive movement and touches her hand gently.*)

MARION

(*With an indescribable, whimsically tender smile.*) Shall we go to dinner, Charles?

(*She takes* CHARLES' *arm and the four of them move slowly away,* BOBBY *and* CICELY *following abstractedly, absorbed in each other.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

PRACTICE MAKES . . .

By Elinor Maxwell

HE is handsome. He is forty. He has lived. And he says he wants to marry me because I am the most unsophisticated creature he has ever met. He's right, of course, oh, of course, he's right! Still, I am scared to death for fear some day I'll kiss him just a little bit too—er—well . . .

REVISITED

By John V. A. Weaver

I GO back to the old house
When the years have fled.
Blindfolded, I could walk
With a sure tread
Queer little passage-ways,
Quaint beloved halls,
Guided by the old feel
Of well-known walls.

I dodge from the huge chest
That stood beside the stair;
I grope all about the hearth
For the great chair;
And at the sacred small room
None else could know
I claw at the secret door
Locked long ago. . . .

And yet, to me, who loved you in that day,
(As still), "You do not understand," you say! . . .

LOVE is the explosion; marriage the débris.

THE ZANY

By Lillian Foster Barrett

I

THEY were at dinner. The richly panelled walls gave out a gloom that seemed to settle heavily on all conversation to the ultimate extinction of it. The ceiling, with its weight of carving, impended threateningly. The polished floor responded with echoes, hollow and sepulchral, to the cautious tread of the footmen.

Millicent Traymore sighed wearily; her husband responded in kind. The butler cleared his throat; one of the footmen swallowed audibly.

"The lawn fête was a great success," said Millicent in laconic tone.

"Was it?" Delaney roused himself from his torpor to meet the remark with sufficient intelligence.

Conversation lapsed again. After all, how could one keep it up to tempo in that depressing atmosphere of heavy formality?

"Mrs. Austin Sears was there," Millicent resumed.

"Was she?" Delaney felt he was doing his share.

Hence, startled surprise when Millicent roused herself and with a flash of her dark eyes cried out:

"Is it? Was it? Was he? Is he?"

Her mimicry was perfect. Delaney would have burst out laughing had it not been for the presence of the austere footmen grouped about. As it was, he drew himself up with dignity and said nothing.

Millicent had flushed violently, regretting her words the minute she had uttered them. She glanced furtively about at the attendant servants to see if her outburst had been noticed; there was nothing to indicate that it had.

Another silence fraught with depression and gloom!

Millicent leaned forward to light a cigarette in a candle. There was the sound as of a faint sizzle.

"Damn!" she exclaimed as she put her hand hurriedly to her hair to ascertain the extent of the conflagration.

The heavy panels caught the word and sent it back with reverberations. Delaney covered his mouth with his hand, pretending to stroke his moustache.

"Coffee here or in the card-room, madame?" inquired the butler with superior air.

Millicent shoved her chair back with a defiant scraping sound.

"In the card-room, Horton," she said and swept proudly out of the room.

Comfortably ensconced on a divan in the card-room, Millicent showed herself as distinctly mortified, exasperated, disconsolate.

"I don't know how it is," she wailed, "but we *can't* get anywhere."

Delaney was lounging in a big chair beside her. He stirred his coffee thoughtfully.

"I wonder if we're not silly to try," he said.

Millicent sat up quickly at that.

"Now there we are! *You* don't try. No wonder we can't make any headway—"

"But, my dear!" protested Delaney.

"Yes, I know everything you're going to say," Millicent cut in irritably. "You've taken the finest house in Bar Harbour and you're spending more money than anyone else in the colony and—and—"

"Well?" asked Delaney. "What else can I do?"

Millicent gave him a despairing look. "Can't you see, Delaney, it isn't what one *does*, it's the way one does it? Plenty of people with far less than we have to offer have managed to break in. Here we are—heaps of money, fairly good families back of us, education and —and we have to content ourselves with hanging on the fringe of things."

Delaney pondered. Millicent must, of course, be humoured.

"What is it you think we—er—lack?" he brought out at last.

"*We?*" echoed Millicent, and then sank back among her pillows as if overcome by the weight of her husband's obtuseness.

"Oh!" he exclaimed brightly. "It's *I* who am at fault! I see. Well—let's have it. What's the matter with me?"

Millicent wrinkled her pretty brows into the semblance of a frown.

"You—you lack nuance," she brought out at last with conviction.

Delaney nodded thoughtfully. "So, that's it. Sort of too much all one colour—eh?"

"Yes," answered Millicent. "Of course, not literally. You're quite all right to look at."

This last with a charming smile of appreciation.

"Mentally, then?" he queried after a pause fraught with the weight of deep appreciation.

"No, not that, either, I should say," Millicent rejoined.

Then, as if plunging at a hurdle she had been trying to make up her mind to take for some time, she hurriedly went on:

"It's your moral monotony that stands in our way."

Delaney was startled out of his well-regulated self.

Then, putting back his head, he proceeded to enjoy a good laugh.

"You mean if I were a rotter I'd get by," he said when his mirth had subsided.

Millicent gave him distinctly to understand by her hurt look that she considered his hilarity very much out of place.

"Of course if you treat the whole matter flippantly—" she began.

"I'm not—" Delaney hastened to assure her. "But what am I to understand you wish me to do to attain this very essential nuance? Wine and women—"

"Don't be vulgar, Delaney," Millicent put in. "You can be so *very* at times."

But Delaney wasn't listening. His thoughts were running in quite a new channel.

"I say," he burst out at last, "have *you* it?"

"What?" asked Millicent.

"This moral nuance you're advocating."

"Of course," said Millicent with conviction.

Delaney stared.

"You can't mean you—you *do* things."

"Certainly not," answered Millicent with a pretty superiority. "I merely let people *think* I do."

"The devil!" exclaimed Delaney.

Millicent smiled condescendingly, then, reaching over, took her husband's hand.

He really was very nice and even now, after six years of married life, she still knew herself to be very much in love.

"Don't be alarmed, dear," she said with tender patronage. "It's simply a social trick, one you could learn easily. And, after all, there's no harm in it. All you have to do is to pretend you *would* do things if your whim dictated; imply, too, that you *have* done things in the past and *will* do things in the future. But—don't you see?—you're quite protected in the present."

Delaney showed himself as plainly worried, and very much bewildered.

"Milly, darling," he protested as he seated himself on the edge of the divan. "I don't like it. It's risky."

Millicent snuggled close.

"Dear old Del," she murmured, "you *are* so stupid and New England."

Delaney suffered himself to be kissed.

"Has it never occurred to you, Milly, there *is* a danger of slipping? That

the influence of this set you so want to break into is an insidious one, that it somehow gets a person in spite of—of—of—oh—lots of things. That's why I made such a row about coming here. Our own little set in Montclair was quite good enough for me."

"But what could one do with millions in Montclair?" sighed Millicent.

Delaney was firm. "Everything one can do in Bar Harbour or Newport or Paris. I've regretted many times that father's made so much money. We haven't had a really happy moment since."

Millicent's eyes filled with tears.

"Now have we, honestly, dear?" pursued Delaney tenderly.

But Millicent would not be reasoned with.

"I am ambitious above everything," she persisted obstinately. "I don't care for the snubs or the horrid belittlement or anything, as long as we get there eventually."

Delaney sighed heavily.

"I care for *that* more than anything in the world," wound up Millicent defiantly.

"And you're willing to sacrifice *me*," began Delaney with a smile, "offer up my morals on the altar of social ambition."

They both laughed at that.

Millicent put her arms about Delaney's neck; they both realized the question was settled.

"Mrs. Austin Sears was almost cordial this afternoon," Millicent resumed.

Delaney said nothing.

"Couldn't you bring yourself, Delaney, to—to—" Millicent faltered.

"Certainly not," put in Delaney quickly, "she's not my type."

"But we can't *all* be dark," answered Millicent.

"True!" said Delaney. "But Ethel Sears! No, it can't be done."

"I'd coach you," pleaded Millicent.

"Anybody else but not *that* woman." Delaney was unusually firm for him. "Why under the heavens select *her* when—"

"But don't you see *she's* the one who has shown herself very lenient of late? She even seeks me out occasionally. And she is, undoubtedly, a power. Conciliate her with a mild flirtation and—Oh, *can't* you bring yourself to do it, Delaney?"

Delaney again pondered.

"But if she has been lenient of late, why not let things take their natural course, without resorting to all this strategy?"

Millicent rose impatiently at that.

"Because I'm tired of going on this way. Because I'm bored and nervous and—and—"

Her voice broke.

Delaney had risen, too, and was all ready to present his shoulder for the curly head to rest on, as Millicent burst into a flood of tears.

"Let's go back to Montclair and cut all this," he murmured between endearments, as Millicent sobbed out her irritation with pretty abandon.

But she shook her curly head decisively.

"Never," she cried, "as long as there's one way left untried."

Delaney gave a sigh that proved he gauged accurately the measure of his marital responsibilities.

"Very well, darling. If Ethel Sears is the only way, God's will be done."

II

It proved to be of the nature of an adventure, and one that Millicent thrilled to with the keenest delight. She lay awake nights mapping out the details of Delaney's campaign and even tabulated certain remarks to be introduced aptly into his *tête-à-têtes* with the lady. A veritable juggler she was, the patient Del her zany, and she never tired of thinking up new tricks.

The affair was helped along, moreover, by the arrival on the scene of Curtis Dexter, Millicent's young cousin, just out of college. Millicent's cue was to devote herself to Curt, thus enabling

Del to range at large. She flirted desperately with Curt at the Pool, the Casino. They drove and rode together.

Delaney looked on with a resigned melancholy Millicent had schooled him to assume. Melancholy was becoming to his handsome face. 'Twas but natural, therefore, that the ladies, the susceptible ones, should go out of their way to flash smiles of consolation.

"We must distract him from the antics of that butterfly wife of his," Mrs. Carling Wood vouchsafed. Her intention was good, even if her figure was mixed.

"Nice eyes, good build!" pronounced Christine Ralston. "We must incite him to tennis."

Delaney suffered himself to be lured into many activities in the weeks that followed. He was a good tennis player and was soon in great demand on the courts. He played polo; he danced.

"Splendid!" cried Millicent as he reported each night the points scored. "But how about Mrs. Austin Sears? You *must* get on with your lovemaking. Curt is boring me intolerably and I can't hold out much longer."

Delaney sighed wearily.

"Milly, dear—" he began to protest.

She interrupted him.

"Just how far, now, have you got? Did you see her to-day?"

"Yes," Delaney said. "But she's not athletic, you know. I have to rely on stray moments about the courts, or a word or two at the Pool."

Millicent wrinkled her pretty brows.

"The point is to let her know you're interested. How about sending her flowers?"

Delaney started.

"Good heavens, Milly—"

"American beauties," pursued Milly obdurately. "She loves them. The day she had that public fête at her place I saw the most gorgeous bunch in the library—"

But Delaney was genuinely angry now.

"Look here, Milly," he cried, "this is all rot. I'll be blamed if I'll—"

Fifteen minutes later, with Milly crying in his arms, he was saying:

"Wouldn't plain roses do? There's something so—so compromising about American beauties. Perhaps, later—"

Milly, however, persisted.

"American beauties!" she said, and American beauties it was, the largest, most costly, most compromising bunch Bar Harbour had to offer.

"I met Mrs. Sears!" Millicent announced the next night triumphantly to her husband. "She gave me such a pitying look. Isn't it a lark?"

"Isn't it?" said Delaney drily.

"Have you seen her?" pressed Millicent.

"I'm going there to tea to-morrow," Delaney announced.

At which Millicent threw her arms about his neck and kissed him ecstatically.

III

Mrs. Austin Sears picked him up the next afternoon in a remote byway.

"Shall we drive around a little first?" she said, "or go directly home?"

"Oh, directly home, of course," he said with quick energy.

Ethel Sears smiled at him lazily.

She was blonde and languid, of a subtle charm that disconcerted extremely. She admitted herself unscrupulous and so drew the sting of gossip, yet she guarded her affairs with the utmost secrecy.

They drove the four miles to her country place almost in silence. Yet the silence was not one of awkwardness and constraint; rather it betokened an easy intimacy and understanding.

"You're looking a bit down these days, Del," she said at last.

Del frowned.

"Business worries—" he answered.

"I wonder," she mused softly.

Then, after a pause fraught with speculation, "Or is it that fly-away wife of yours?"

Del started to protest, but Ethel put her hand on his.

He took it and mechanically proceed-

ed to button and unbutton the dainty glove.

"Of course, you know I'm not condemning Millicent," she said with a light laugh. "I'm only questioning her methods. She's flaunting her flirtation outrageously."

Del sighed wearily and admitted the truth of her statement.

"As for me," Ethel went on, "I get my greatest joy from—well—not the affair itself, but the delicious contriving of it."

Del laughed.

"I see. It has to be illicit."

"Of course. Moreover, I enjoy a man whose wife would make a most particular row."

Del showed himself amused, though somewhat bewildered.

"But you yourself know that Millicent—" he began.

Ethel nodded sagely.

"It's because she's so sure of you that she dares; and she's sure of you because she's desperately in love with you—"

"That's not logic," said Del.

"It's *my* logic," flashed Ethel. "Meanwhile, here we are!"

Tea was ready for them in the drawing-room.

"I am not at home to anyone," said Ethel to the footman. "That will do."

She turned to some roses on a table.

"Your gorgeous roses—" she said. "They are a continual reminder—"

Their eyes met in a languid look of comfortable well-being, with underneath a suggestion of something else. Quite naturally they came together and he put his arms about her. He kissed her several times; she let him, standing there with closed eyes.

Then, with a deep sigh, she drew away and seated herself at the tea table.

"I could almost find it in my heart to be sorry for Millicent," she said at last, softly.

"Poor little Milly!" he said. "I feel guilty myself when I think of her."

Then with sudden inspiration:

"I say, why can't you be nice to her? She's ambitious, socially, you know. And, of course, what you say goes in the Colony—"

Ethel Sears stared.

"You mean I might *push* her?"

"Yes." Del, once started, forged ahead. "You see, it would be a sop to *my* conscience and"—he wound up with a smile—"it would increase *your* sense of the illicit."

Ethel Sears reflected a minute, a dawning smile breaking over her face.

"Del!" she cried at last. "How delicious!"

Then, putting out her hand for his, she drew him down on to the divan beside her. Again they kissed as those to whom a caress has become a habit.

"Is it a go?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered eagerly. And the compact was sealed with another kiss.

IV

BAR HARBOUR said Mrs. Sears did it to show her authority. She, who at the beginning of the season had given them the cue to ignore the little Mrs. Traymore, was now going out of her languid way to push the newcomer.

It was very awkward for everyone concerned, but there was nothing to do but make the most of a bad situation. The transitory stage from complete ostracism to warm reception was a difficult one to effect gracefully.

However, Millicent's very eager desire to "get in" rendered subtlety of treatment unnecessary. She was like a child upon whose ravished sight there bursts the first glory of a Christmas tree. Mrs. Austin Sears had given a big dinner; the Traymores were included. After that, it was easy. Millicent gave herself up to the whirl of events that followed with a ready zest. As she saw her name in the New York papers grouped with those of Bar Harbour's most exclusive clientèle her happiness knew no bounds. Once in the New York *Sunday Times* she had been pictured entering Mrs. Austin Sears' motor. Mrs. Sears' hand was upon her shoulder in an attitude of graceful intimacy.

Millicent presented the picture to Del in charming triumph.

"Did you see? Isn't it jolly? What will the folks in Montclair say? And it's all been so very simple."

Del said nothing.

"All for a few American beauties—" she went on.

"How late are you planning to stay here?" Del interrupted with seeming irrelevance.

"As late as *she* does," was Milly's ready answer.

Del sighed.

"Is it as bad as that?" Milly laughed. "What has happened lately? I've been so busy I've neglected to follow."

"Well, let's see—" Del settled down with a businesslike air. "A dozen kisses, I should say. I put my arm about her now and then when I think of it. We talk on the subject of attraction and sex, analyze our feelings, forget to turn on the lights when we should—"

He paused.

"That's about all," he finished a little gruffly.

Millicent nodded sagely.

"You've caught on the game," she said. "Our future is secure!"

Then, with an amused little smile, "you can't imagine how I *gloat* over Mrs. Sears."

Del had a sudden thought.

"Suppose she should find it out, Milly?"

Milly considered.

"That would be the end of us socially," she pronounced with conviction.

"A damned good thing if it was," put in Delaney with a sudden flare of irritation.

"Del!" Milly's tone showed genuine pain. "How *can* you?"

Then with the thought he might play her false to gain his point, she had turned to him in a last desperate appeal. Her lips trembled and her eyes suffused with tears.

"Del, you *wouldn't*, you *couldn't* go back on me now. Promise, oh, promise, you'll never tell her!"

She looked so childish and wayward Delaney drew her to him and kissed away the tears.

"I promise, sweetheart! If she ever finds out, it will be through you—"

In the weeks that followed Millicent and Ethel became more and more intimate. They took to running in on each other, just dropping in at any time, a fact that alarmed Del unconscionably. There was the time he was forced to hide ignominiously in an alcove of Ethel's boudoir and listen to his wife's babble for a full hour.

"An intrigue *de luxe*," breathed Ethel softly afterwards.

"Wasn't it a scream?" laughed Milly when he reached home. "Of course I *knew* you were there all the time. The portière kept moving—"

With the waning of the season Del felt all intrigué. One thought alone stood out clear cut against the shifting background of his doubts and indecisions; that was, as he put it to himself, that he was "dead sick of the whole social stunt." In proportion as he longed for his own unpretentious little set in Montclair, he fumed at Bar Harbour standards. Then had come the idea of trickery.

He had promised Millicent that Ethel Sears would never know the truth through him. He recalled vaguely that somebody (some Italian, wasn't it?) had said something rather clever about the end and the means. Well—here was a case in point. To get Milly and himself away out of all this social miasma was an end that would surely justify any means. Yes, he'd screw his courage to the sticking point and *tell* Ethel. But—oh, confusing thought!—Ethel had a few little things she might tell Milly, and *Milly* would be at the disadvantage. No, that could never be! He would have to begin at the other end. Tell Milly first and then—

Delaney grew more and more bewildered. There was bound to be a nasty and disagreeable scene any way you put it. So Delaney delayed. Averse always to the intricacies of thought process, he could not bring himself to the point of formulating any definite

scheme of action. A sluggard he proved even before the fresh and healthful vision of Montclair.

Then, one bright September day, events precipitated themselves to a climax. The scene involved, however, was far different from anything Delaney could possibly have anticipated.

He and Milly were at breakfast, sorting their mail. It was the first of the month with its inevitable deluge of bills. Milly was slitting open the envelopes carelessly and then, with a cursory glance, tossing the contents over to Del. The florist's bill came to notice. With a smile of amusement, Milly allowed herself a delicious lingering moment to peruse it.

"Oh, you've let it run all summer. Two hundred and seventy dollars—American beauties—" She chuckled. "Not bad when you think what it's brought us."

Del put out his hand with a startled movement, even as Milly's face clouded.

"But there's a mistake!" she cried. "American beauties twice a week in *June*. We weren't here in June. That is, *I* wasn't here—"

She stopped, puzzled and bewildered.

Then, as if doing some rapid calculation in a businesslike way Del had never thought her capable of, she rose.

"So *that's* it!" she said coldly. "While you were looking for a house you were not too busy to be carrying on an affair."

Del had risen, too, red and stammering.

"Let me explain!" he faltered. "Milly, I—I—"

So suddenly and unexpectedly had the crisis come upon him that Delaney's presence of mind quite deserted him. The more so as there seemed a complete reversal of rôle. Had Milly followed her usual bent for tears and sobs and reproaches, Del would have known exactly what to do. He would have handled the situation with all masterful coolness and efficiency. But before such close-lipped restraint, such deadly sarcasm, he was powerless.

"Look here now, Mill—" he could only stammer. "You don't know who—who—"

Milly gave him a sweeping look of contempt that reduced him to speechlessness.

"I know perfectly," she said. "It's Ethel Sears!" and with that she swept in haughty dignity from the room.

Delaney, left to himself, fumed and swore. His spirits asserted themselves, however, with the thought that now things would have to work out his way. There would be a violent scene between Milly and Ethel—the result, a rapid closing of the Traymore season. After that—the renewal of their old life at Montclair. Rather neat, after all!

However, as he saw Millicent, still white and determined, enter her motor an hour later, he could not help muttering to himself "Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!" The broil of feminine intrigue worked on his imagination.

An hour passed. He wondered if they would do vulgar, physical things to each other, pull hair and scratch. Ethel, no! But Milly?

Two hours passed. Each ring of the telephone left his nerves all of a jangle. What was happening?

Three hours passed. Poor little Milly! What a brute he'd been to deceive her! But the years stretched ahead, when, free from the stigma of social ambition, he could make it up to her. If he had her in his arms that minute, he would kiss away all doubt, all suspicion from her dear eyes!

Four hours! He could stand it no longer. Some disaster must have happened.

Five minutes later he was steaming up the Sears' driveway.

"Is Mrs. Traymore here?" he asked, but the question was unnecessary.

Millicent's electric was in the driveway and he heard a familiar sob coming from the upper regions.

"Yes, sir!" said the footman.

"I'd like to speak to her, or to Mrs. Sears!" Delaney went on with would-be carelessness and sauntered into the drawing-room.

A few minutes later the footman returned.

"Mrs. Traymore and Mrs. Sears were not at home to anyone!"

Del stared.

"But, good God!" he cried in consternation. "Perfectly preposterous! Perfectly—!"

The footman turned a deaf ear to his entreaties and a minute later Delaney found himself ignominiously turned out of the Sears portals.

There followed a hideous night of sleepless anxiety. A note from Millicent arrived early in the morning.

"Will you kindly get my maid to pack a few necessary things and send them over to 'The Pines'? Mrs. Sears has been good enough to ask me to spend a few weeks with her. I need time. I cannot yet bring myself to forgive you —nor can she—"

"Well, I'll—be—damned!" said Del.

The two women had made common cause against him. His social career had just begun.

REVERSION

By David Morton

ALONG my blood old, sullen musics beat,
And savage chants, and hoarse, forgotten lays,
Light tunes that have outlingered dancing feet,
And hymns surviving hair they meant to praise.
Their hot insistence will have never done
For new articulation and warm breath—
Lost through old, leafy countries in the sun,
Hushed, since those feet had danced their way to death.

And you who sit there, primly pouring tea,
With every nice regard—how should you know
That in my brain the tom-tom's reveille
Calls us to savage dances, and we go,
Your anklets flashing under tropic skies,
Your flying hair a madness on my eyes.

PIVOTAL moments in a woman's life: (1) the time she is first kissed by a man and (2) the time she first kisses a man.

WOMAN is attractive at twenty, attentive at thirty, and adhesive at forty.

THE FIRST PROPHET

By Harry Kemp

UNGHK was the first prophet. It was very long ago that he lived. His tribe was so low in the scale of life that they had but barely learned to creep into caves for shelter; even now, as a remote racial remembrance, we still have a saying applicable to that phase of human development. . . .

"He doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain," we remark of one particularly obtuse. . . .

But indeed it took a severer effort of mental concentration than we know for early humanity to learn even that.

Unghk's tribe had at least learned to come in out of the wet. They crowded into a newly-discovered cave for shelter. But they had not yet dared the use of fire. It was taboo and unholy to make fire oneself. But to crouch before it for warmth when it happened accidentally by a stroke of lightning was held to be permissible.

Unghk was a prophet. His brain teemed with visions.

The first time he felt the inexplicable, mysterious spirit descend upon him he said,

"There will come a time when our tribe will be so many that the face of the earth will be covered by our descendants."

And the crowd marvelled, and every time he spoke henceforth they gathered eagerly around him. And this made Unghk believe more and more in himself. . . .

"There will come a time," he said again, "when men will take caves like this one in which we live, and put them over the other till there are very many all in a heap. And they will climb up and live in them."

And the crowd murmured its applause of the impossible thing. And one of the hunters gave him a newly cured wolf-skin for what he had said. . . .

"There will come a time," he still said, "when this water we see running in a little stream at our feet will be made to go upward as through a reed, and it will feed with water all the caves that stand on top of each other."

And many presents were given to Ungkh, for he amused the people with prophesying what they thought was ever beyond the range of coming to pass.

But now Unghk, as was inevitable to one set upon so high a pinnacle—and now Unghk began to feel the weight of his mission, and to look about for abuses to correct, and improvements to suggest through his spirit of prophecy. . . .

"There will come a time," said he, "when Fire will become the slave of Man, and cease being his God . . . and men will use Fire and no longer bow down in ignorant worship before Him."

There arose a murmur at this.

"He is talking what is not right," said his fellow cavemen, one to the other.

Unheeding the drift setting in against him, he proceeded further.

"There will come a time when men will no longer slay the Old and Sick of the tribe, burying them alive."

"The man is going mad," said one to the other. "Is he not trying to overturn a just law that we have known from time immemorial?"

"There will also come a time," chanted the rapt seer, blind to the rising story, "there will come a time,"

went on the prophet, emboldened, "when our maidens will no more have their two first front teeth knocked out on their arriving at adolescence."

There was a long hush.

Then the head man of the tribe rose and exclaimed,

"This is indeed too much!"

"Aye," exclaimed an old Medicine-man, "may there never come a time when our maidens grow so immodest as to go about in the light of day, brazenly, without the absence of their two first front teeth, as decency and morality require."

So the hollow log of council was beaten. A solemn convocation was called. And the prophet, who had hitherto had great honour, was now put to death because he had prophesied to the detriment of Religion, Law, and Morality!

BURIED TREASURE

By Proctor Fitzgerald

HIS favourite hobby was buried treasure. He believed that the earth was honeycombed with loot, that it was not necessary to dig anywhere in particular. He finally persuaded a friend to help him become rich through digging. Selecting the first place at hand, they plied pick and shovel. At a six-foot depth they struck an oblong box. This was to be expected; it was not unusual. As the field of their operations they had chosen a cemetery.

SONG

By Michael Crevequer

THE wind going over the city
Is blowing my wishes to you,
And my heart would be sending a love-gift
Of sunlight and dew.

But the wind that I love from the mountains
Bears rain and a fluttering leaf,
And always I send to your dreaming
The gift of my grief.

THE most undesirable neighbourhood for a woman to be in is in the neighbourhood of two hundred and fifty pounds.

THE BED-POST

By Gertrude Brooke Hamilton

I

THE lapping tongue of society predicted oblivion and ostracism ahead of Nella Orrison—there was nothing, the rippling tongue hinted, that might impede her heady whirl over the cascades dividing the conservative, the swift, and the impossible circles of Manhattan. Nella had married into the conservative circle by allowing Pelton Orrison to ring her finger; she had drifted into the divorcée circle by taking upon her shoulders an unsavoury escapade of her dear little friend, Cindy Garnett; and, not content with the borrowed robe of a delicately audacious sinner, she was now eddying toward the impossible circle by appearing in public with Jim Walloon, the man of Cindy's shifted indiscretion.

Every circle cognizant of anybody rated poor old flashlight Jim Walloon below par! Walloon had pots of money, and he was known from one end of Broadway to the other. He was accredited with having saved flappers innumerable from untimely gas-routes; some said that he kept a basket of money swinging in his rooms wherein friend or foe might plunge needy hands; he was a target for the speed policemen; a joy to the race-tracks; an everlasting figure of comedy in the law courts.

When Nella Orrison linked her name with Walloon's it seemed, indeed, as if no straw, nor dyke, might stem the tide carrying her toward social damnation!

But there *was* a straw to hold her back from Jim Walloon.

When Walloon asked her to marry him, she half laughed and shook her head.

"Somehow, I can't," she told him.

Walloon laughed, too.

"Why?" he demanded.

"An obstacle hangs between," she demurred.

He reddened, and blurted, "You still care for that skeleton-in-armour—Orrison."

Her laughter was wholly for him. "If I'm in love at all just now, I'm enamoured of your funniness. For some reason or other, I'm mirthful when I contemplate your fascinations. And laughter has, surely, the first rating in these dour days!"

In the same instant she shook her head again, vehemently.

"That little nothing hangs between us," she reiterated.

Walloon's big bulk slumped in his chair and a ring on one of his fingers lent a forlorn flash to his attitude.

"By joy!" he ejaculated. "I'm right! You're still fond of Orrison."

She was reflective—frankly thinking aloud: "I wonder if I am. Pelt was good enough to be thoroughly fond of; he was aloof enough to preserve as an idol; he was fastidious enough to really respect."

Shadows shifted over her expressive face and settled in her brilliant eyes. In an attitude suggestive of skidding thoughts, she swung a foot not unlike the slim, spirited hoof of a blooded mount.

Walloon watched her.

By and by, she turned her head toward him with a brimming smile.

"I'm not in love with him!" she declared, positively.

Breaking into gay laughter, she leaned forward and laid her fingers over the hand with the underbred ring.

Her impossible suitor stared down at the milky fingers.

"By joy, I believe you!" he cried.

He beamed on her.

But, sighing, she withdrew her hand.

"There's that trifling snag," she murmured. "It will, I fear, keep me clinging absurdly to the name of Orrison."

He shoved back his chair, rising.

"Pshaw!" he said.

He nurtured a natural distaste for the name of Orrison, which the courts had allowed her to retain.

Looking down at her with the tide of red rising in his good-looking, rubicund face, he burst out:

"What is this junk-idea that prevents you from marrying me?"

Her retort was accompanied by an unexpected blush.

"I shan't tell you," she laughed.

"You must tell me, Nella."

His hands cupped her elbows and he drew her to her feet. He easily pulled her into his arms, and, with a nicety that was one of his surprising qualities, let her go and merely held her hand.

"I suppose I shall tell you all about it," she admitted, reluctantly. "You have about you, Jim, a disarming decency which enables me to explain the bit of nonsense in the closet of my heart."

With a movement at once confidential and impetuous, she re-seated herself and motioned him to do the same.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you what the obstacle is."

He hauled his chair to her side.

Nella frowned; on the brink of candid revelations.

"It's idiotic as any impediment ever fashioned," she warned.

Clasping her hands about her knees, she began, without preamble:

"There hangs on a bed-post in the residence of Pelton Orrison a lace negligée of mine—at least, it should hang there, if one is to believe any man's love-promise."

She swung her foot again, looking at nothing in particular.

"Pelt hung the lace gewgaw on the post the second day of our honeymoon—we honeymooned rather oddly, not going out of town; but shutting ourselves away from our world and sheltering our raptures in the eastern wing of Pelt's town house. Have you seen the Orrison town house? If you have, you know what the eastern wing looks like; how it juts off from the rest of the building, how high its windows are, and how a spiral of outside steps winds up to a curious door. This door leads into the room where Pelt once decorated a bed-post with my negligée—it was to stay there, he said, as a symbol of mutual constancy. Heigho, the cobweb symbol! When I left his house and protection, it still hung on the post of the bed in the isolated eastern wing. I stole up there to kiss it good-bye and tell it to stay there."

She continued, almost blithely:

"Perhaps you won't believe this of me, him—you know I haven't a reputation for sentimentalism—but every now and then I take the trouble to ring up the house of Orrison and inquire of a maid whether or not a negligée hangs on the bed-post in the eastern wing. Each time the maid has replied in the affirmative. And the thread of lace between my hotel and the house I once presided over is strengthened to a thread of something rather fibrous. Nonsensical, isn't it? Utterly foolish!"

She sat back in her chair, unlocking her hands and looking at him with heightening colour in her spirited face.

Jim Walloon also leaned back in his chair. "Foolish? It's tommyrot!" He was obviously relieved by the slight texture of the obstacle.

The colour came and went in her smooth cheeks.

"Yet," she meditated, half to herself, "while the lacy thing hangs on that bed-post as a symbol of fidelity—though he divorced me for a very sad reason—I cannot quite bring myself to marry another man."

Her direct mention of the divorce made Walloon wheel in his chair.

"You speak as if he had reason for his suit! Now if little Mrs. Garnett had—"

"Jim," she interrupted pleasantly, "you made a ninny of Cindy Garnett. Someone should have been spanked for that misadventure."

"You got the spanking for saving a ninny's reputation," he ruefully grimaced.

He brought his hands down on the arms of his chair. "By joy, I remember my first sight of you!—when you plunged into my rooms on the hunt for Mrs. Garnett. And your face when confronted by a skunk Orrison had hired to watch you! Lord, you were splendid! It was your high-handed silence, your look of ladyship—your inability to come down to any level of explanation and incriminate your little friend—that spanked *me*."

His resonant voice tripped with emotion.

He regarded her with tons of admiration.

"Knowing what you are, I can't see how I spank up the courage to court you. D'you know, Nella"—his broadly handsome face held a shade of abashment—"you've swept my slate clean of any woman but you."

He got to his feet, embarrassed.

Though her upward glance was soft, her hands lifted with a gesture of scepticism.

"As well assure Pelt that the knowledge of my negligée on his bed-post has formed an aureole for my brow!" she scoffed. "Your reputation is against you, Jim."

He laughed. "That comes of being too noisy."

"I can feel for you." She extended a sympathetic hand. "So many of my follies have been noised abroad."

"Pshaw," he rejoined, taking her hand, "your faults could be used as ten new commandments!"

"They would not be placarded in any cathedral," she sighed, rising.

Walloon was loath to take leave of her. He stood looking at her with his hat and stick in his hand.

"Honest to God, you won't marry me, Nella?"

"Not while the faithful negligée of a supposedly unfaithful wife hangs in my mind, Jim."

"Isn't there some way to jolt it out of your mind?"

"There may be; I do not know."

"If there's a way, I'll find it," stoutly.

"I hope so, Jim—for I'm inclined to like a life of laughter."

She gave him her eyes for a second.

"Trot along now," she told him. "I've an engagement with my dressmaker this noon."

She watched his big figure go from the drawing-room of the suite she was occupying in a hotel on the Avenue.

Interlacing her hands behind her head in a posture of ease, Nella experienced the inward amusement that always followed the departure of her lovable, impossible admirer. With quirking mouth—and softened eyes—she reviewed his proposal of marriage and his protestations of affection. He was so different from Pelton Orrison! He had nothing but his blundering attractions and some nice streaks in his attitude toward women.

Yet she could readily understand how a white moth like Cindy Garnett might have been momentarily drawn to Walloon. Little Cindy—whose mother had married her to the wealthiest of the Garnetts—had, perhaps, been a victim to one of those transient infatuations which sometimes seize upon idle young matrons and not infrequently bring them to wreckage. Nella knew that only one man had ever really stirred the mothlike emotions of Cindy—that man was Pelton Orrison, who, as a young bachelor, had sued for Cindy's hand and been rejected by the ambitious mother; Nella had heard the bitter-sweet tale from Pelt's own lips, and it had made her always compassionate of the little creature who had obeyed an avaricious mother, and afterwards toyed with impossible adventures.

Nella's reflections lingered on Cindy —whom she had not seen since the mix-up with Walloon. She recalled how prettily affrighted the blonde mite had appeared clinging to portieres that shielded her from the "skunk" who thought he had earned his hire in finding Nella Orrison in Walloon's rooms. Cindy must have wept a bucketful of tears that evening! Since then, had she put aside youthful peccadilloes and contented herself in the palatial jail up the Avenue, where her mother enjoyably presided over the retinue of Garnett servants?

An impulse to chat with Cindy Garnett and see how life was treating her made Nella rise, and dress leisurely for the street. It would be zesty reconnoitring to gossip for a half hour with the swift little friend who had unwittingly tumbled her into the divorce courts; it would be pleasurable as a journey back to familiar haunts.

She fastened her sables and picked up her muff with a feeling of actual anticipation.

II

The weather was resplendent that day and Nella enjoyed her walk up the long thoroughfare. Many preened women and well-dressed men were on promenade; the throngs had the freshly tubbed look of a forenoon on the Avenue. Nella—with the exclusive taste of the Orrisons still clinging to her garments, the rapid grace of the Garnett crowd evident in her gait, and the impossibly broad joy of living unconsciously filched from Walloon shining from her glances—was a noticeable figure in the panorama of the far-famed street.

She took the sweep around the Park and approached the Sixties.

The pile of marble wherein Cindy's edified mother followed a gorgeous routine glistened dully in the high noon; Nella had a twinge of pity for the young atom of girlhood imprisoned by the multitudinous barred windows and wrought-iron doors!

She ascended the steps of the edifice with the feeling of going up to a sunless tower.

Cindy was at home to her erstwhile friend. She saw Nella in her boudoir, where she was in negligée taking her morning chocolate.

Her upward glance of greeting was one of fluttered surprise.

"Of all people—Nella Orrison!" she exclaimed.

Nella gave Cindy a kiss.

"How are you these days, my dear? You're looking well."

"Am I?" murmured Cindy—wistfully retaining the end of Nella's sable stole. "I'm feeling far from strong. However do you manage to keep such bloom?"

"My blooming spirits, I suppose," shrugged Nella, seating herself on a flowery lounge and throwing aside her furs.

Cindy rang for an extra chocolate cup.

"Wherever have you been keeping yourself in the last months, Nell? It always makes me fidgety to have a friend sink from the surface—one never knows at what point of the ocean they may reappear."

"Don't worry," philosophically. "If I strike the rocks I'll have tact enough to romp for ever at the bottom of the sea."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" protested Cindy. "I meant, you might be eyeing me from afar!"

She took the fragile, tall cup that her maid brought in and tilted the chocolate pitcher, watching the smooth beverage whip into the cup.

"You know, you possess rather far-seeing eyes, Nell," she added, pensively.

Nella tasted her chocolate.

"Few credit me with foresight, Cindy!"

"As if people at large ever credit us with anything," sighed young Mrs. Garnett. "What do they know of our impulses or our real characters? Whyever do we place any valuation at all on public opinion?"

Her misty blue eyes swam with un-

expected tears. She fingered her chocolate spoon in fitful abstraction.

Nella's brows came together. "Public opinion is ballast, my dear. Look at me for a terrific example. I didn't care a sandbag what was said of me."

She routed the coming frown with easy laughter.

"I know," shivered Cindy.

Her delicately pointed teeth clamped and released her lip.

"Though my impossible nature may merit some credit, after all," laughed Nella; "it once saved your pretty skin, eh?"

She added, with a shade of impulsive warmth,

"I trust, little one, that you haven't felt any further need of a fool fond enough of you to pry into your desperate minutes and rescue you from their consequences."

Her tone implied a query, quixotic solicitude for this moth who had flown beyond the reach of Pelton Orrison.

Cindy regarded her in dismay. "Whatever do you mean by 'desperate minutes?'—"

"Oh," with a catch of her breath, "you're recalling the goosie I made of myself by masquerading as a stranded flapper and seeking assistance from Jim Walloon—I wanted so to find some sort of diversion in those days—I—did not mean to be really naughty. I was up to any wild trick that might distract me from Jack Garnett and Mamma. I didn't dream you'd follow me, Nell; and that a detective would follow you! I'd read of such things happening, husbands keeping a watch on their wives, but I didn't know that you were— If I'd had your courage, I'd have come out from behind the curtain and told the beast why you were there. But I'm a timid little thing. Why, Mamma would murder me in cold blood if I lost the Garnett money!"

She began to tremble.

"Nell," piteously, "I'm sorry if you've suffered because of me."

"My dear," replied Nella, putting aside the chocolate cup and assuming her favourite attitude—hands locked about her shapely knees, "forget all about it, after you've answered me one question; did you imagine yourself in love with that big blunderer of Broadway—Jim Walloon? How could you, Cindy? He's such a farce!"

"I didn't," averred the white moth. "I'd met him only once, at a party given by those outlandish Madders. He looked as if he might prove interesting. In love with him? No."

A cloudy look crept into the blue of her eyes and her slight breast was shaken by a sigh.

"I'm in love with Jack Garnett and Mamma," lied young Mrs. Garnett.

Nella was quick to say, "Poor little Cindy! What a shame they didn't let you marry Pelt!"

Cindy's retort lacked breath. "Pelt?—Pelton Orrison? Whatever do you mean?"

"Why, Pelt told me ages ago of wanting you before he met me," explained Nella; "and I suppose you wanted Pelt before your mother met Jack Garnett, eh? Heigho, what a muddle all of it is! Such mismatings! Such mistakes! Such misunderstandings!"

Cindy was silent.

"I half wish," continued Nella, letting her humour to talk carry her on, "that so decent a man as Pelton hadn't misunderstood me. Often, Cindy, it rushes over me—horribly. If he'd been more like the average man, less honourable, nearer Walloon's type, the rush wouldn't hurt as it does. There are times, indeed, when I'm tempted to go to him and tell him the truth. And where would that leave his old idealization of you? What good would it do? Could we patch things up? I think not."

She leaned back on the lounge soberly eyeing a stream of sunlight along the floor of the boudoir.

She was conscious of Cindy's prolonged silence.

Turning her head, she saw that Cindy was crying, as only a small and blonde woman can cry—exquisitely and without sound.

"Why—my dear!" expostulated Nella, jumping up.

She went to Cindy and put her arms about her.

With a movement childishly dejected, Cindy crumpled in the generous embrace.

"I wish I were dead," she wept. "Oh, I do wish so!"

Nella took out her handkerchief and patted the dampened cheeks. She sat Cindy up in the cushions of her chair as if she were not unlike a melting wax doll.

"Let's stop talking of the past, baby," she suggested. "All our surcharged agonies of two years! Your Mamma will be scolding me for giving you pink eyelids. Come, we'll chat less deeply."

She touched the fluting of Cindy's abbreviated sleeve. "What a charming negligée you're wearing—I haven't seen the pattern before. It's cut all in one piece isn't it? And these cloth-of-gold butterflies appliqued over it—they suit you to perfection."

Though Cindy stopped crying she shrank back into her cushions.

"Mamma always has butterflies on my lounging-robes," she faltered at random, trying to regain her poise.

"I had a fancy once for lace couch-robes," nodded Nella, making talk.

"Mamma ordered a dozen of these one-piece things." Cindy was afluff of moist chiffon and cloth-of-gold in the shadows of her chair. "All of them have gold butterflies."

She changed the topic by saying, apathetically,

"Is it true, Nell, that you're going about with Mr. Walloon?—Jack heard so at one of his clubs and brought the news home to Mamma. It made Mamma purse her mouth—you know the way she does. Is it true?"

"True as your butterflies," replied Nella, with heightened colour.

She reached out a long arm for her sables.

"It seems so strange," commented Cindy, in a faint way. "I wonder what—Pelton thinks of it."

"I suppose it confirms the hireling's evidence," smiled Nella, without much humour. "Pelton's restricted imagination could not concede the possibility of my not having met the co-respondent before the fatal night! On the rare occasions when my sense of justice ruffled up and I made half an attempt to explain away my seeming infidelity, he would simply hold up his hand in his cold manner, and say, 'Please, Nella!'"

Cindy leaned forward and caught the end of the sable scarf.

"Make me a promise, Nell," breathlessly. "Promise me that you'll never, never tell Pelton Orrison why you were in Walloon's rooms. I'd die of shame!"

Cuddling the sable stole against her breast, she looked up at Nella with humid eyes.

"Don't blame me for anything I've done," she pleaded. "I do have my desperate minutes, and their consequences—!"

She added, timidly,

"'*Why should little things be blamed?*
Little things for flaws are famed; . . .
Love, the wingéd and the wild,
Love was once a little child.'"

Impulsively, Nella stooped and kissed the whispering mouth.

"I shall never tell good old Pelt," she promised.

Cindy released the stole with a grateful gesture.

"Good-bye, my dear," said Nella, affectionately. "Continue to love Jack Garnett and Mamma. Be the good little wife God made you to be. I do not know if we shall meet again—Mamma's pursing mouth, you understand."

"I'm sorry," smiled Cindy. Her head drooped. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Cindy." Going toward the door of the boudoir.

"Good-bye, Nell."

III

THE sun was not shining so clearly when Nella came out on the Avenue again. The throngs had the slightly

seared look that follows the progression of a Manhattan day. Not being in the mood for her dressmaker, the late wife of Pelton Orrison gave the rest of the afternoon to a walk through the wilderness of Central Park.

Her thoughts, for no tangible cause, reverted to the bed-post in the eastern wing of the Orrison residence—to the unforgotten lace negligée there. The lace tidbit seemed the pivot around which her mind had revolved all day. Had she gone far from it in her scene with Cindy, with its intimate trend and futile tears, and in her rejection of Walloon had not the lacy obstacle played its part? Her mood of self-communing warned her that before the close of the day she might telephone an Orrison housemaid and go through the usual bootless inquiry, that yielded her an equally bootless satisfaction!

In and out the weave of reflections concerning that shut-off eastern wing where she had honeymooned ran involuntary memories of Pelton Orrison; and, recalling a character she could not cease to admire, she regretted for the hundredth time the pride that had held her back from any clear defence of his accusations. With emotions hovering around Pelton, and around that quiet eastern wing, Nella half longed to live again within the shelter of his house. Of late she had been in the midst of so much clamour! The world was such a noisy place!

She was thinking this when, at length, she turned homeward. Sundown had brought with it a haze that might mean rain that night. She compared the vapours of the town with the mists in her own being, and she conceived a desire to clear-headedly view herself.

Was she still fond enough of Orrison to reject Walloon? That was the question befogging her. As the dark fell, there rushed over her a whim to argue out her question in no other place than the eastern wing of Pelt's residence—in the room where she hoped her lace negligée still hung.

A nonsensical whimsy! A freak of the heart!

In the early night, her footsteps turned across town, toward the exclusive section where she had lived with Pelton Orrison. She planned—if her headlong impulse had any plan—to enter his house by the side-spiral of steps that led directly to the eastern wing. She would bury her face in her wedding finery and thus take counsel with herself and learn just where she was going!

She walked rapidly, as one does when led on by memories.

Pelton Orrison's house was so like him!—she found herself frowning as she came to the corner-bulk of brown stone that brought a stately row to a finish. She could see the usual illumination in the front entrance of the residence, the lamp that the footman lit every evening at twilight. The spiral of steps on the side-street was dark.

Nella began the ascent to the eastern room. She noticed the lowering sky as she climbed, there would be no stars this evening, the town would soon be drowned in a purple haze.

She found the curious door of the eastern sleeping-chamber unlocked, and, with a foolishly pounding heart, turned the knob.

The room appeared just as she remembered it.

Through the creeping dusk, she placed each familiar object: there was the mirror with the double reflection, the rosewood furniture, the solid blue rug, the blue curtain-stuff, the frieze of plain blue. She stood by the door absorbing each dim outline.

Memory, poignant because of its youthfulness, welled up in her, swelled to an emotion nearly beautiful and flooded her consciousness with trivial recollections—she recalled Pelton's face in its tenderer moments and dwelt on each ecstasy she had fancied eternal. After awhile, she brought herself to look across the room toward the spot where he had hung the lace negligée.

The post was still decorated with a filmy garment!

Her hands clasped. She experienced a sense of unconfined pleasure.

Her negligée was still there!

In the forgetful town, the clamourous, strident town, there hung this fragile symbol of her fidelity.

She moved forward, with outflung hands.

The room was nearly dark.

Along the familiar length of the blue rug she went slowly, found the electric button on the wall and pressed it.

Each object of the place sprang into prominence under the roseate flow of light. Turning, she saw in the sudden illumination that the negligée hanging on the post was not of lace!

It was not hers!

The negligée was a one-piece garment appliqued with cloth-of-gold butterflies!

She stood as if frozen.

Cindy's butterflies—here!

She shrank back. Her hands had all but touched the garment. She had been on the verge of shrouding her face in it. She had come across town because of it, thinking of it as a symbol of fidelity. And it was not hers! It was appliqued with frail glistening butterflies.

Cindy's butterflies—*here!*

She was not inclined to make any outcry, or to feel any rending sense of revulsion. She was, rather, inclined toward a sinking sense of incredulity and the stinging shame that is sometimes aroused by a folly we have nothing to do with.

Guiltily, as if she had blundered upon the desperate moment of two souls, she plunged the room into darkness.

For a minute or two she clasped and unclasped her hands. But blood surged into her cheeks—she blushed for her girlish rhapsodies of a minute before and for the emotions that had led her to hang a thread of fidelity between herself and life! Through this spurt of burning self-derision, the revelation she had stumbled upon wrung her heart. Recalling Cindy's tearful wish for death, she pieced a swarm of butterfly words together and fashioned from them a whole garment of folly!

It grew completely dark except for the glimmer from the high windows.

Nella crossed the room toward the door—and heard footsteps coming up the spiral flight.

Running back into the room, she sought the deep shadows behind the double mirror. The footsteps, though familiar, did not belong to Pelton Orrison.

Looking around the mirror, she smothered an exclamation in recognizing the bulky figure of Jim Walloon limned against the door of Orrison's eastern wing.

Her surprise kept her in the shadow.

Walloon entered the isolated chamber with a tread unaccustomed and uncomfortable. He did not know the room as Nella knew it. She could have shrieked when he jostled a chair, and knocked into a wall-angle. She hung fascinated upon his movements.

She watched him feel his way along the rug, toward the bed-post!

With bated breath, she saw him find and pocket the butterfly negligée.

A paroxysm of something like laughter rose in her throat. She perceived what Walloon was doing. His way of removing the "obstacle" between them was uncomplex—merely walking up the steps she had told him of and pocketing the first silken garment at hand. She could have wept for her simple, sophisticated lover as she sensed his flare of joyous victory in securing what he thought was a symbol of feminine faithfulness.

Walloon was almost at the door again when Nella stepped from the shadow of the mirror and called to him.

He retraced his steps—disregarding any obstacle in his way.

"Nella!" he said, fiercely. "You here?"

"The same errand brought us here, Jim; the negligée on the bed-post."

She gave him her hand, to verify the truth.

Though he could not see her face distinctly, and though he had been fooled by many fair hands, the touch of her fingers made him stammer,

"By joy, you care for me!"

He caught her by the elbows. "You wouldn't have come to get it if you hadn't cared!"

He stopped to look squarely into her eyes. "Isn't that so, Nella?"

"It may be, Jim." Her voice was hardly audible.

"You didn't want anything to hang between us—you wanted to clear the way as much as I did. You came, and I came; and, by joy, I got it first! It's mine now. And you're mine. Aren't you?"

Holding her by the elbow as if she were already his bride, he guided her along the rug to the door, and the circular flight of outside stairs.

On the sill he paused long enough to kiss her.

She allowed him a second of unalloyed triumph.

Then they descended the steps, seeing less of the sky as they neared the street.

Nella was at the bottom of the flight when she saw Pelton's car speed by and round the corner to the main entrance of the residence. The machine stopped smoothly. She watched her former husband go into his house and saw the entrance-light fall on his face as he passed under it. Her own face was suddenly drained of colour.

Wordless, she started along the by-street with her tacitly accepted suitor. It was beginning to rain, a saturating drizzle that promised to clear the atmosphere. The thoroughfares were dim mirrors for the lights of the town. "Jim," she said, as they crossed Broadway, "take me to dinner this evening—choose a rather noisy place."

She walked in step with him, looking ahead. They turned into the Avenue, shining with the rain, and traversed it together. In the few blocks of shimmering concrete, Nella passed several persons of the Orrison circle and one or two of the Cindy Garnett set—the young divorcée cut these acquaintances before they had a chance to bow coldly! She was acutely cognizant of the long, licking tongue of society as she walked up the Avenue with Jim Walloon.

In the drawing-room of her suite, she said to him.

"Give me the negligée, Jim; and strike a match over the fireplace."

Nella watched the gold butterflies shrivel in the destroying flames—she hoped, with all her heart, she might quickly forget that Cindy's Mamma always had butterflies on the moth's lounging-robes!

CAPRICE

By Babette Deutsch

COME without a word now,
Nothing said.
Come without a vow
In your head.

Eyes that shout with laughter,
Sweet mouth dumb.
Still, or wild and wicked . . .
Come!

MOONLIGHT

By Theodosia Garrison

WHEN girls sell posies beside the curb
And the days grow long again,
The white moon spreads her silver net
Over the dreams of men.

And he is unsnared of souls alone
Who moves in a present bliss—
Step by step with his own true love
With the touch of her hand on his.

But over the hearts of lonely men
The silver seine is thrown,
And across the tide of the empty nights
It draws them on to their own.

And some go back to the carnival
Where the fiddles play shrill and high,
And some are drawn to a love to be
And most to a love gone by.

MY LADY

By John McClure

SHE walked among the evening clouds.
Her face was in the dawn.
Herself was in the very flowers
The moonlight shone upon.

I had not known how lovely
The glowing world could be
Until I worshipped beauty
And beauty made me see.

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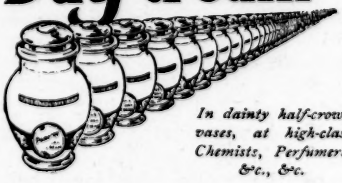

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ABOUT FASHIONS AND OTHER THINGS

By Various Hands

Dilly and Dally have no place in the world of gaiety. A good appearance is a splendid "kick-off," as a slangy friend once remarked; and having once got that start, it is not so difficult to keep in the swim of things. Four and a half years of war have taught women to have simpler tastes in matters sartorial. Nevertheless, it is the simplicity of the rich, and the little frock of to-day costs far more than the exaggerations of other days, for it needs perfection in cut, and cannot be camouflaged with countless little etceteras. The "line" is altering once again. The day of the girl with the slim boyish figure is on the wane, and the ideal is now—or rather, it will be before long—the elegant grace of the beautifully modelled outline, not statuesque like the Venus de Milo, but tall and slender and yet moulded on soft rounded lines. Only those who are gifted with such a figure by nature can hope to look their best in the very newest models that are finding their way over from Paris, as they seem to be designed to reveal the beauties of nature rather than to mould them to fashion's form. The waist is carefully defined, and is in the place that the Bon Dieu intended it to be; in fact, the newest mode demands that we shall be true to nature in every outline—and, after all, what can we want better?

Nevertheless, those who do not possess the rounded curves of beauty, and to whom the little straight frock has come as a boon and a blessing, can take heart of grace, for these will remain with us for many a long day to come. Those others have only reached the most exclusive ateliers at present.

One famous actress in Paris is appearing in a very lovely dress moulded entirely on Greek lines. The figure is swathed in cloth of silver, revealing the beautiful outline, and guiltless of ornament save for the glimpse of pink net in the décolletage, and the shoulder-straps of pearl trimming. The tight drapery is caught in a knot to one side of the waist, and from there falls in one very long narrow sash-end, which is flung over the arm or allowed to trail along the floor at the sweet will of the wearer. Another very popular silhouette, which is a variation of the one just described, is that with a wide drapery below the hips that tapers away to a mere nothing at the feet. Some of these are almost barrel in outline, and start from a perfectly natural waist-line; but as they are usually carried out in such filmy materials as lace, net, or georgette, the effect is distinctly pleasing. One very charming evening frock worthy of note boasts a full tunic of gold-fish net weighted with wide gold lace insertion that reaches just below the knees. Beneath this are two or three superimposed rows of the gold lace, each one getting narrower towards the foot, the whole mounted on a soft foundation of gold-tinted georgette. The bodice of this little dance frock is a mere nothing of gold net swathed round the figure, and insertion, arranged with an early Victorian fichu effect over the shoulders and crossing demurely in front. Lace, and again more lace, is used in everything. Not always the priceless heirlooms handed down to us by our ancestors, but the once despised imitations are having an innings at last, and since their long life does not have to be considered, they are being dyed very successfully to carry out some dainty colour schemes. One delightful frock that will do duty at a royal garden party, for a wise mother who no longer desires to compete with the blue ribbons and silvery gauze of her daughter, is carried out entirely in a creamy chocolate shade of charmeuse, georgette, and dyed cobweb lace, the bodice being of charmeuse swathed across the figure, caught on either side of the waist, and ending in long loose panels over a very filmy underskirt of georgette and dyed lace. The back of the bodice has a square of the charmeuse, and the skirt boasts a long wide panel of the same, the lace being slightly draped on either side to give an appearance of width. The waist is well defined, and a little vest and short sleeves of the same complete a very

"NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH."

PINE COTTAGE,
APPLEFORD.

Dearest Margaret,

Four of us have taken this darling little cottage, and in spite of the very uncertain weather, we are having a topping time. Beryl Danesmead is down here; we only persuaded her to come after pointing out that the great ONE and ONLY BABY would probably be much happier if left to a far more competent nurse and grandmother for a week; Mabel Legrange, who's taking a week's holiday from the land; and a nice girl called Louise Gilbey, whom you don't know, who's been driving an ambulance for the last eighteen months. I am the fourth. We get all our own food and do our own cooking, etc., and are enjoying it all thoroughly.

The day before yesterday an icy wind sprang up: we are on a hill, and by the evening we were all chilly and cross. At Mabel's suggestion we went into the pine-wood and gathered some cones and dry twigs, and after supper we sat round a very jolly little fire.

Do you know a game called "Truth"?

It's a nursery game in which you ask each other questions, and you promise solemnly to answer truthfully. It was my turn, and looking across at Louise, who had let down her long brown hair, I asked, "What do you do to make your hair so lovely, Louise?"

"What a question!" she laughed. "S'pose I've got to be truthful. I'll take it out of you in a minute, Estelle. Well—" she paused impressively, and we pricked up our ears.

"In the first place I always shampoo my hair with stallax. I've tried heaps of other stuff, but that's the only one that fulfils every requirement. You buy it in packets—2/6 each, enough for 25 or 30 shampoos. Its funny-looking, granulated stuff, but it smells lovely—rather like orange blossom. Most shampoos lather so slowly, but stallax works up into a lovely foam directly you rub it on your hair. Afterwards my hair dries very quickly and looks *so* wavy and glossy. Another tip is to rub olive oil into your scalp before shampooing, because water dries up the hair so; and always keep your brushes very stiff and clean. But the saving of my hair was tammalite. When I was twenty, my hair suddenly began to go grey—it's in our family—you know. I was terribly worried, and I wouldn't use a dye—then someone told me about tammalite. I went straight off to the chemist, got some, and made it up into a lotion with bay rum, and applied it with a clean tooth-brush. Very soon my hair regained its natural brown, and now, whenever I see a grey hair, I fly to tammalite."

"Wish I'd got curly hair like you, Louise," said a voice from the corner. "S'pose tammalite won't make your hair wave?"

We laughed, but Louise said, "Tammalite won't do that, Beryl, but I know what will. Get some silmerine from your chemist and comb it through your hair at night, just putting a slide in where you want the wave, and you'll be surprised at the result, which will last for several days. It's a good idea to do short ends of hair, damped with silmerine, up in pins every now and then. The little curls last for several days, and isn't it nice, when you're out in a wind, to feel that it's ruffling your hair up in little ringlets, instead of blowing unbecoming wisps into your eyes? Well, I guess it's time I got the truth out of someone else. Now, Estelle, come on and tell us how you got that peach-like skin of yours?"

"Common sense, soap and mercolised wax," I said. "The first explains itself. I keep decent hours and don't feed entirely on sweets and pastry. The second is the best soap I know, namely, pilenta, which is absolutely neutral, and never makes your skin rough after you've washed, even in the hardest water. The third is rather interesting. It used to worry me when I saw every baby in the street with a complexion like roses and milk, which it didn't need in the least, whereas mine was just coarse and muddy. Louise has set us such an example of truthfulness that I feel moved to confess that I used to get blackheads. Well, one day, I talked to our doctor, an absolute dear, and he said, 'You girls all sigh after lovely skins, but you go to work the wrong way. You buy cheap scented creams, anything which smells nice or is put up in a pretty jar. Consequently your skin is clogged up with waste matter. Let your skin have a chance to breathe, that's the great secret, and feed the tissues underneath instead of blocking all the passages through which the waste matter is expelled. If you'd get some ordinary mercolised wax and smear it over your face and neck before you went to bed, you'd soon see a wonderful improvement. It's a perfectly harmless substance, which absorbs the soiled outer cuticle, and leaves the fresh new skin underneath exposed. Also it feeds the tissues and prevents wrinkles, so that if you follow my advice, you'll keep a smooth fresh skin till you're quite an old lady.' Then he told me that to cure blackheads, which are only caused by enlarged pores (caused probably in their turn by using powder), I must get some stymol tablets. One dissolved in a tumbler of water makes a sparkling face bath which loosens the blackheads. It's a good idea, he told me, to bathe your face from time to time with stymolised water, just to keep the pores in a normal condition, and to prevent blackheads and shine."

"What did he say about powder?" inquired Beryl.

"He insisted on my giving it up."

A little "oh!" of dismay went round the circle.

"But he told me that I need not be afraid that my appearance would suffer. He gave me some stuff called cleminite. I dissolve it in water and bathe my face and neck with the clear rosy lotion. That takes off all the unbecoming 'high lights' and gives a velvety finish to the skin, which prevents sunburn and windburn and freckles. That's all. And I vote for bed and beauty sleep."

I have reported this conversation in detail, because I thought you might like the benefit of our unwonted candour.

Hoping you can run down for a day or two,

Yours ever,
ESTELLE.

charming and not too youthful toilette. The ubiquitous cape effect is not entirely absent, but in this case the veil supplied the omission.

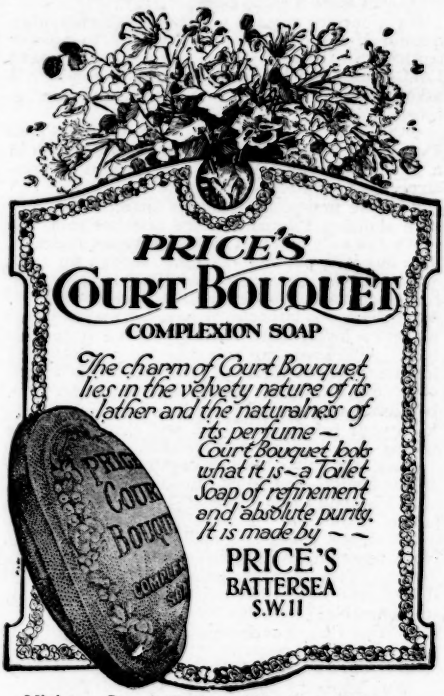
Floating veils are gaining in popularity every day, and are very new. They do not cover the face, but are fastened round the crown of the hat, shaped like a cape, and allowed to float over the back and arms, reaching almost to the elbow at the sides and far below that in the centre of the back. The whole effect is very dainty and alluring. The one I am thinking of at the moment was of filmy gold, and worn over a wide shady hat of chocolate-coloured manilla straw.

OBLITERATE THE SIGNS OF WAR

The London season has come into its own once more. With garden parties at Buckingham Palace and other festivities, the beauty specialist is again hard at it, and woman no longer delights in her war-time complexion. In fact, it is one of the marks of war which we must obliterate with all speed. Whether you have been driving a car in dirty London all day or nursing in France all night, the effects can be quickly removed by a little attention from Mrs. Adair, of 92, New Bond Street, whose complexion and eye treatments have helped for a decade to maintain the Englishwoman's reputation for facial charm. The Ganesh treatment has achieved popularity by purely hygienic and sensible methods. Mrs. Adair guarantees all her preparations as hygienic and harmless, and her treatments free of any trenching on the surgeon's province. She sends boxes of preparations with instructions for home treatment to ladies in the country and abroad, and is very successful at treating complexions spoilt in the tropics. Her Ganesh Muscle Oil, Eastern Cream, and Diable Tonic have a world-wide fame, and there is no question of the improving effect of her treatment upon the facial contour, preventing the sagging of the cheeks caused by muscle relaxation in middle-age. The Ganesh Chin-Strap, worn at night, is a clever means to this end.

A BURNING QUESTION

The problem of heating well and wisely, that is with cleanliness and economy, is one that has been ably solved by the London Warming and Ventilating Co., Ltd., 20, Newman Street, Oxford Street, whose spacious show-rooms afford everything both useful and artistic in heating apparatus, to furnish a church, a mansion, or a kitchen with equal success. Their stoves—closed and open—are specially designed for anthracite, which is synonymous with economy, in that it is slow, steady, sure, and requires very little attention. Anthracite, besides being smokeless and sootless, gives three times the heat compared with soft coal. Mr. Florence, the genial head of the firm, has registered a huge success with his own patent. "The Florence" grate, which has been supplied to the Admiralty, the Office of Works, and other notable buildings.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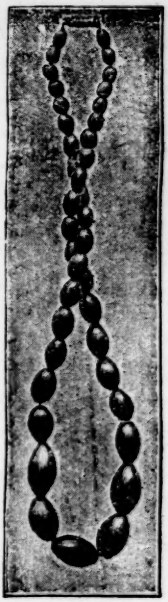

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MOTORS AND MOTORING

By W. Whittall

ON DANGEROUS DRIVING

It is scarcely surprising that complaint is rife on the subject of the dangerous driving of cars, which has become almost an epidemic since the restrictions on motoring were removed. Undoubtedly there is less consideration being displayed for the safety and convenience of road users than ever before, and the wonder is not that there are complaints from all over the country, but that there are so few. I am not going to make excuses for which there is no ground. The motorists who are doing so great disservice to the cause of automobilism deserve no mercy either at the hands of the law or of their fellow-users of the King's highway. Nevertheless, I think it is as well to record the reasons why the present state of affairs exists, in order that there may be no misapprehensions as to why it exists and who is responsible. The war has brought into the ranks of motor drivers many who never before drove or owned cars, and whose sole experience of driving has been in the Services. Obviously, the general standard of road manners which obtained on the Western battle-front is not the best for English roads in peace time. Nor is the speed at which Staff cars were habitually driven in France exactly suited to our ideas of safety and the legal limit. Again, many women have learnt to drive, and are now being turned loose on the roads in charge of powerful cars which they are really not competent to handle properly. I do not say they are not able to drive. My own experience of women drivers is that when they drive well they drive better than the average man, but the trouble with most is that they have no road knowledge, and are guilty of breaches of highway courtesy out of sheer ignorance. The same is to be said of a great many male drivers, who have never graduated to the car through the cycle or the horsed vehicle. I am very strongly of opinion, therefore, that most of the bad driving which is the subject of present complaint is due to ignorance of the proper use of the roads and not to moral turpitude.

MAKE THE CAR THIEF-PROOF

The present epidemic of car-stealing has been responsible for the introduction of a great many so-called thief-proof devices, most of which are calculated to make the expert thief laugh at the ease with which the motorist can be persuaded to part with his money. I was shown a device the other day, however, which was quite a different matter. This is the "Cowey" ignition lock, which is fitted on the high-tension leads and short-circuits the current when in the "on" position. As the wires pass through a long sleeve it is impossible to trace them and so re-wire the car in the short space of time usually available to the would-be thief, and it can only be moved to "off" with the aid of a Yale pattern key. Of course, given an hour or two an expert thief would get away with the car, but that applies whatever precautions may be taken. The Cowey is about the best thing of its kind that has come under my notice.

A TRAFFIC NOTE

Everyone whose interests lie with the roads and their use and administration is thinking about the problem of London's traffic, and of how to alleviate a situation which is going from bad to worse. Among the cause of congestion it does not seem to have struck local authorities that the absence of any regular system of showing street names is responsible for much traffic delay. Many of the busiest streets in London have no names displayed at the most essential points, which means that drivers of vehicles are often compelled to pull up to make enquiries as to their whereabouts, with the consequent result that the whole traffic scheme is delayed. The cumulative effect of such delay must be something very substantial in the course of a year, and represents a loss of time and money which would surprise people if it could be worked out by the statisticians. I understand that the point has been submitted to the Local Government Board in the hope that its influence will be exerted in the cause of reform.

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